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Regularly mistaken for a boy and/or a vampire, the traveler Kuro roams the land, clothed in black from head to toe, a Kuro-sized coffin on her back. Accompanied by her snarky bat friend, Sen, the mysterious duo meets all sorts of individuals en route–some good, some evil, some just plain crazy! But Kuro never stays in one place for long, begging the question: What exactly is she searching for? And what exactly does she intend to do with that coffin!?

Told in *4-koma* (four panel) style and peppered with full-color pages, Satoko Kiyuduki's debut captures all the whimsy of the most memorable fairy tales!

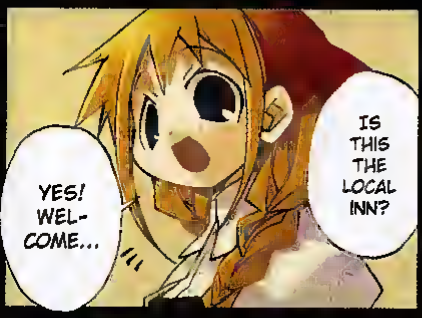
Shoulder-a-Coffin
KURO
1
Satoko Kiyuduki

Yet, the traveler is in the midst of her long, long journey...

And this story will be but a small part of that sojourn.

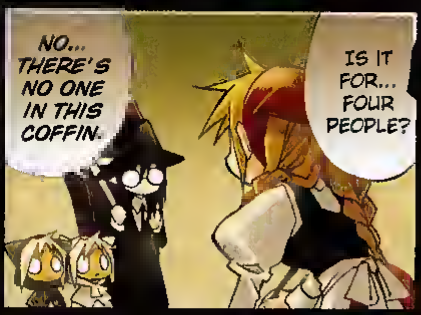
Characters

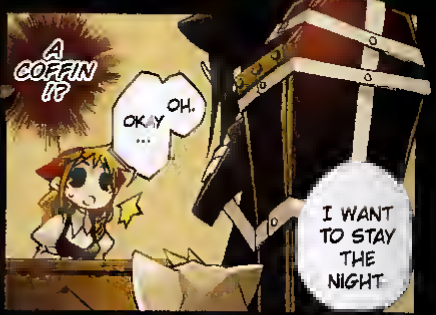
Shoulder-a-Coffin Kuro


IS THIS THE LOCAL INN?
YES! WEL-COME...

I'M A NORMAL GIRL WHO WORKS AT AN INN.
I'M IDA.

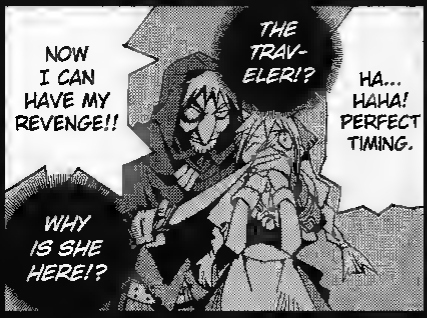
...WAS A MYSTERI-OUS AND PECULIAR...
...TRAVELER.
THE PERSON I MET THAT DAY...
Shoulder-a-Coffin
KURO


NO... THERE'S NO ONE IN THIS COFFIN.
IS IT FOR... FOUR PEOPLE?

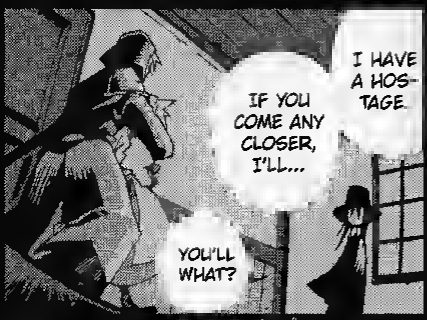

A COFFIN !?
OKAY ...
OH.
I WANT TO STAY THE NIGHT

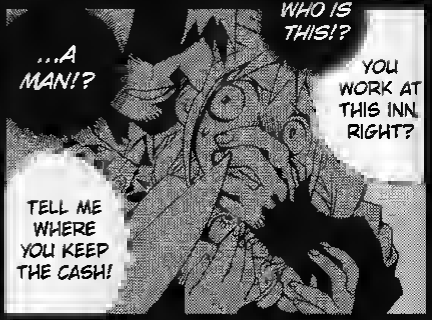
OH, THANK YOU.
I BROUGHT YOU SOME BLANKETS BECAUSE...
...THERE ARE THREE OF YOU AND ONLY ONE BED.
EX-CUSE ME.
IDA.
WELL IT DID TAKE THREE WHOLE DAYS TO MAKE IT HERE THROUGH THE FOREST
ME TOO.
I'M TIRED.
WHAT A WEIRD GIRL...
I WONDER IF SHE'S GOING TO TAKE THE BED.
SURE.
PLEASE GIVE THEM TO THE KIDS.
OH
I THINK I HEARD SOME TRAVELERS MENTION IT.
YES, MA'AM?
HAVE YOU HEARD THE RUMORS ABOUT A VAMPIRE?
OH.
WHUMP
WHUMP
UM...
SCATTERED AROUND IN THE FOREST LIKE THEY WERE LOST FOR THREE DAYS...
PERHAPS?
PLUS...
WHERE DO YOU THINK THEY FOUND THE PEOPLE?
THEY FOUND SOME PEOPLE LYING ON THE GROUND!!
YOU LOOK EXCITED
I HEAR THAT THE [redacted] VAMPIRE APPEARED NEAR THIS TOWN!
LET WHAT OUT?
WHAT!?
KURO-CHAN, LET THEM OUT.
NOT YET, BECAUSE THE LADY IS STILL HERE.
LATER.
AH.
HEY, THEY WANT TO COME OUT.
THUMP
THUMP WHUMP
SFX: WHUMP WHUMP
N-N-N-NO!!
!?
...ARE YOU THE VAM-PIRE!?
...
OH

IT'S BOTHERING ME. I CAN'T REST.
CLACK CLACK
COULD IT BE? COULD IT REALLY BE!?
Y-Y-Y-YES! I'M FINE.
WHAT'S WRONG, IDA? YOU'RE PALE AS A GHOST
I'VE GOT A CROSS AND GARLIC READY.
I'LL BE FINE!
I JUST NEED TO PEEK INTO THE ROOM AND CHECK...
COULD THAT TRAVELER BE THE RUMORED VAMPIRE?
IF SO...
LET'S SEE... IT WAS THE ROOM IN THE BACK.
THAT'S WHERE THEY'RE STAYING...
!
REACH
...SHE MIGHT BE AFTER SOMEONE STAYING HERE!
.....
IDA, YOU CAN CALL IT A DAY. GO REST.
BITTEN!?
FLINCH
OH, YEAH. YOU HAVE RED DOTS ON YOUR NECK AND ARMS.
DARN IT, I WAS BITTEN AT WORK TODAY.
MOSQUITOS?
CRAAAGH

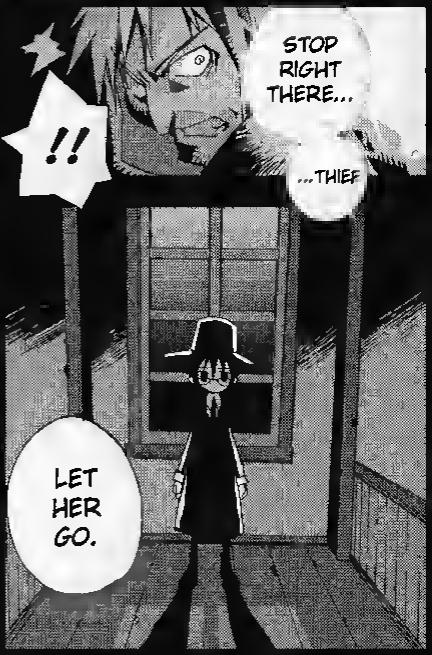

NOW I CAN HAVE MY REVENGE!!
THE TRAV-ELER!?
HA... HAHA! PERFECT TIMING.
WHY IS SHE HERE!?

KYAAA ...!
CLING
SHUT UP!! DON'T MAKE A SOUND!


I HAVE A HOS-TAGE.
IF YOU COME ANY CLOSER, I'LL...
YOU'LL WHAT?


WHO IS THIS!?
...A MAN!?
YOU WORK AT THIS INN, RIGHT?
TELL ME WHERE YOU KEEP THE CASH!

WHOOSH
WHAT WH-THE HECK IS THIS!?
WHOOSH
!?
WHOOSH


!!
STOP RIGHT THERE...
...THIEF
LET HER GO.

I WON'T...
SCREE
SCREE
...LET YOU LIVE THIS TIME.

THE BAT TALKED!
WHA!?
We're not monsters.
Calm down, girly.
FLAP FLAP
SFX SCREECH SCREECH
A-
ARR-GHH-HHH!!
OH...
WERE THESE BATS HIDING IN YOUR LUGGAGE?
THEY WON'T HURT YOU.
THESE BATS ARE MY FRIENDS.
BUT I GUESS THEY STARTLED YOU IN MY ROOM EARLIER.
SCREECH
OH MY GOSH.
OH...
SHE probably caused you trouble 'cos of it.
Sorry about that. Kuro doesn't explain anything unless it's really necessary.
NO problem.
FLAP
PHEW.
THANKS FOR THE HELP, SEN.
...THAT'S WHY I DIDN'T WANT YOU TO HANDLE IT.
I WOULD'VE explained everything and then some, girly...
SHE SHOULD'VE just let me handle it from the start.
FLINCH
EEK!
EE-
I think SHE'S more terrified than before, Kuro.
ARE YOU OKAY?

HOW DID YOU KNOW I WAS BEING ATTACKED?
UM, I'M CURIOUS ABOUT ONE THING.
CHIRP CHIR CHIRP
OH, THAT.
I DE-FEATED HIM BACK THEN
I RAN INTO HIM BEFORE ON MY JOURNEY
THIS THIEF IS A BANDIT WHO CAME FROM THE NORTHERN REGION.
I WOKE UP TO THE SOUND OF FOOT-STEPS.
AT FIRST, I THOUGHT YOU WERE PATROLLING.
I'M SORRY. I CAUSED YOU SO MUCH TROUBLE
I DON'T KNOW IF HE GOT KICKED OUT OF HIS GROUP...
..BUT HE MUST'VE FOLLOWED US...
...FOL-LOWING YOU.
BUT THEN I HEARD ANOTHER SET OF FOOT-STEPS...
...KURO GOT MISTAKEN AS THE CULPRIT LOTS OF TIMES.
BECAUSE THAT GUY ACTED UP WHEREVER WE WENT
WELL, THAT CAN'T BE HELPED.
ACK!
I FOR-GOT!!
YEAH, THE ACCESSORIES ON YOUR NECK AND IN YOUR HAND... ARE THEY IN?
BY THE WAY...
...I'M CURI-OUS TOO.
I THINK I CAN SEE WHERE IT CAME FROM...
IN-DEED.
BUT I WONDER WHY THERE WAS A RUMOR GOING AROUND THAT I WAS A VAMPIRE

I HAVE TO PREPARE FOR MY DEPARTURE.
I'M SORRY BUT CAN I LEAVE IT TO YOU TWO TO HANDLE THE BANDIT FROM HERE?
SIGH
YOU'VE DONE ENOUGH FOR US.
WELL, I WAS SLEEPING ON THE FLOOR, SO I COULD HEAR BETTER.
?
OH, UM... ANYWAY, YOU HAVE REALLY GOOD HEARING.
HEY, LOOK.
OH. THANK YOU.
WE BROUGHT IT FOR YOU.
ARE YOU PROUD OF US?
KURO-CHAN, YOUR STUFF.
OH, FOUND YOU.
THERE'S KURO-CHA.
NIJUKU, SANJU.
WHISPER
HOW CREEPY.
MAYBE SHE'S INVOLVED IN SOMETHING FISHY.
WHISPER
THAT TRAV-ELER'S CARRYING A COFFIN.
WHISPER
!
HUH?
BUT WE DECIDED THAT THE WINNER OF JANKEN WOULD GET THE BED. REMEMBER?
I CAR-RIED YOU GUYS THERE.
WHY WERE WE ON THE BED WHEN WE WOKE UP?
OR MAYBE THAT TRAV-ELER'S THE RUMORED VAMPIRE.
AHAHAHA
.....
THAT BED DIDN'T FIT MY BODY.
IT'S OKAY.

...LEAVING BEHIND THE MYSTERY OF THE TRAVELER'S IDENTITY...
AND SO THEY LEFT TO CONTINUE THEIR JOURNEY.

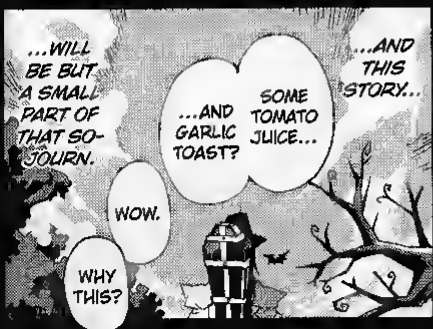
TRAV-ELER-SAN!
...WAIT!

...I NEVER SAW THOSE TRAV-ELERS AGAIN.
WHAT DID SHE GIVE US?
HEY, KURO-CHA.
HUH?
SNACKS?
AFTER THE DAY THEY TOOK OFF...

WHAT'S WRONG?
HELLO, NICE LADY FROM THE INN
OH, HELLO.

RUSTLE
...SHE'S IN THE MIDST OF HER LONG, LONG JOUR-NEY...
LET'S SEE...
YET, SOME-HOW, I KNOW...
HURRY HURRY!

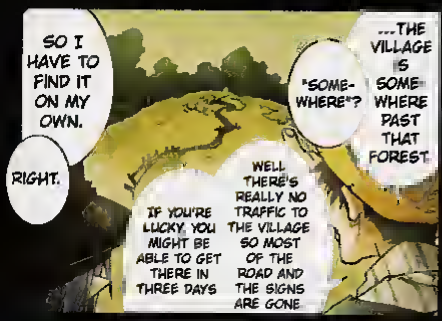
...WANTED TO THANK YOU AND APOLOGIZE TOO.
THIS IS ALL I CAN DO.
?
UM, I MADE THIS.


...WILL BE BUT A SMALL PART OF THAT SO-JOURN.
WOW.
WHY THIS?
...AND GARLIC TOAST?
SOME TOMATO JUICE...
...AND THIS STORY...

THANK YOU.
.....

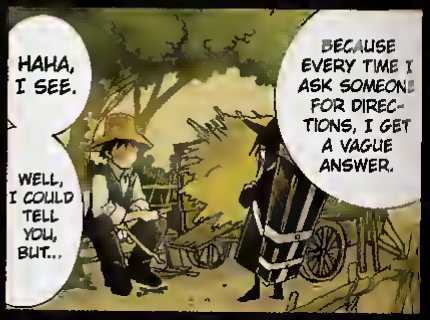
The little girls asked the traveler dressed in black,
"You're all dressed in black, Traveler-san. Who are you?"

SOME-ONE'S THERE.
LOOK.
I CAME FROM OVER THERE.
WHERE DID YOU COME FROM?
ONII-SAN, WHO ARE YOU?
OVER HERE.
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
NOT SURE...
I WONDER WHAT HE DOES?


SO I HAVE TO FIND IT ON MY OWN.
RIGHT.
IF YOU'RE LUCKY, YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO GET THERE IN THREE DAYS
WELL THERE'S REALLY NO TRAFFIC TO THE VILLAGE SO MOST OF THE ROAD AND THE SIGNS ARE GONE
"SOMEWHERE"?
...THE VILLAGE IS SOMEWHERE PAST THAT FOREST.

I SEE! YOU'RE GOING TO LENNEBELL VILLAGE?
SO IT SEEMS.
HARDLY ANYONE GOES THERE.

ARE YOU A MORTICIAN? DID THE VILLAGE CALL FOR YOU?
...I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU HAVE TO GO TO THAT VILLAGE
HOW COURAGEOUS


HAHA, I SEE.
WELL, I COULD TELL YOU, BUT...
BECAUSE EVERY TIME I ASK SOMEONE FOR DIRECTIONS, I GET A VAGUE ANSWER.

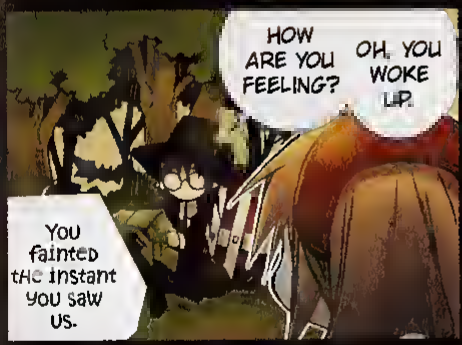
NO...
...I'M A TRAVELER.
AND THIS...
...COFFIN'S FOR ME.

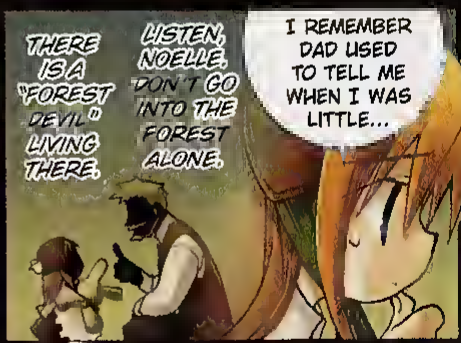
WAKES UP
AH!?
.....

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

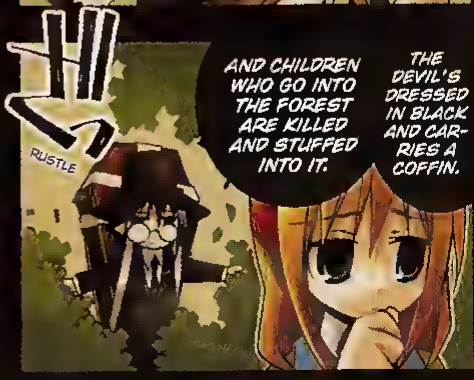
WHAT AM I...
A DREAM?
HUH?

I WANDERED TOO FAR FROM THE VILLAGE.


You fainted the instant you saw us.
HOW ARE YOU FEELING?
OH, YOU WOKE UP.


THERE IS A "FOREST DEVIL" LIVING THERE.
LISTEN, NOELLE. DON'T GO INTO THE FOREST ALONE.
I REMEMBER DAD USED TO TELL ME WHEN I WAS LITTLE...

...ARE THOSE MY ONLY OPTIONS?
I DON'T REALLY UNDERSTAND...
OR AM I ALREADY DEAD AND THIS IS HELL!?
OH NO!! ARE YOU GOING TO KILL ME NOW!?


RUSTLE
AND CHILDREN WHO GO INTO THE FOREST ARE KILLED AND STUFFED INTO IT.
THE DEVIL'S DRESSED IN BLACK AND CARRIES A COFFIN.

BY THE WAY...
...WE WERE LOOKING FOR LENNEBEL VILLAGE
OH, MY VILLAGE?

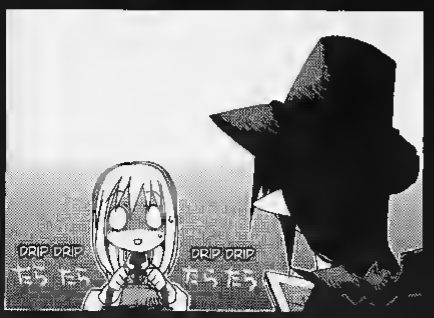
HUH? A TRAVELER?
RIGHT.
I KNOW I DON'T LOOK LIKE ONE

So, girly you're a resident of that village?
YES.
I CAME INTO THE FOREST TO PICK SOME BERRIES.

Just now the man who gave us directions thought you were a mortician.
Obviously. Travelers don't usually carry around a coffin.
SHUT UP

Aren't you glad we found her?
YEAH. NOW WE CAN GET TO THE VILLAGE WITHOUT GETTING LOST
THUMP

...SOOOO SORRY THAT I MISTOOK YOU FOR A...
IT'S OKAY.
I'M USED TO IT


DRIP DRIP
DRIP DRIP

I SEE, YOU'RE A TRAVELER WHO SELLS COFFINS.
.....
EITHER WAY I'M SAFE.
SHE'S WRONG AGAIN

THE SUN'S STARTING TO SET.
WE SHOULD HURRY.
WHOOSH
THE FOREST GOT DARKER.
WHOOSH
...DON'T WORRY!
OH, BUT...
I KNEW IT...
ARE YOU LOST TOO?
OH...
HOLD MY HAND SO YOU DON'T GET LOST.
OH! GOOD JOB.
I MARKED THE WAY AS I WALKED.
.....
BLUSH
I USED BREAD FROM BREAK-FAST.
I TORE IT AND LEFT A TRAIL.
OH!! I'M SOR-RY!!
EH!?
JUST SO YOU KNOW, I'M A GIRL.
BLUSH
I THINK YOU COULD JUST TELL HER THAT WE CAN'T GET HOME.
Once upon a time, there was a fairy tale about a house made out of gingerbread.
OH. I see. Well, let me tell you a story
SFX RUSTLE RUSTLE

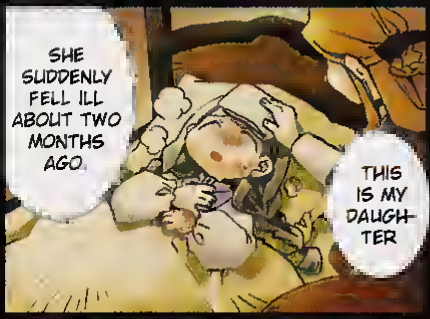
MAYBE IT'S DANGEROUS TO WALK BLINDLY IN THE DARK.
IT'S ALMOST PITCH BLACK.
OH, I'M JUST A LITTLE TIRED AND HUNGRY
ARE YOU OKAY?
HEE HEE!
RUSTLE
RUSTLE
BECAUSE NOW, I CAN USE SEN WITHOUT FEELING BAD.
I'M USING MY TRUMP CARD TO FIND THE VILLAGE
TRAVELER-SAN? WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
HEY! ...THOUGH YOU'RE RIGHT.
CLUNK
I HAVE THE BERRIES I PICKED.
I KNOW!
YES?
OH, BY THE WAY. I NEED TO REMIND YOU.
DON'T FAINT AGAIN.
SFX CLIP CLIP
OH...
SEN, YOU'RE BEING DISRESPECTFUL TO THE FAIRY TALE AND THE ANIMALS.
If you aren't careful in the forest, the bread crumbs and berries will be eaten by the animals of the forest.
THIS IS the moral of the gingerbread house story!!
YOU
FLAP
FLAP
FLAP

.....
NO.
I WON'T.
バサ
FLAP
EEE-EEK.
THESE ARE ALL OF YOUR FRIENDS, RIGHT?
BE-CAUSE...
...THERE'S NO WAY SOMEONE WITH SUCH WARM HANDS...
...COULD BE A DEVIL.
YOU CAN BE HONEST
I'M USED TO PEOPLE BEING SCARED OF ME
OH, UM...
ARE YOU FRIGHT-ENED?
Hey.
.....
I found some lights in that direction.
WE FOUND IT COS IT'S DARK
WOBBLE WOBBLE
WHAT IF...
...I LIED ABOUT BEING A TRAV-ELER...
...AND I'M REALLY THE DEVIL WHO LIVES IN THIS FOREST?
.....?
You have a weird look on your face.
What were you guys doing when I was gone!?
WOULD...
...YOU LET GO OF MY HAND?

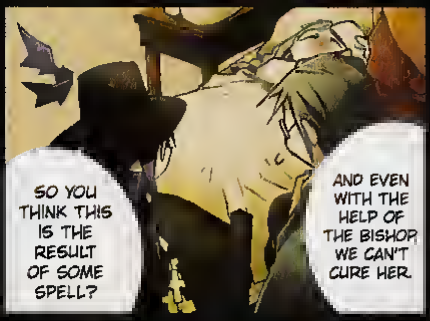
NO-ELLE!!
DAD! MOM!!
NO... NOT YET.
DID YOU FIND HER?
BUT I'M GLAD YOU'RE SAFE
I'M SORRY...
DON'T CAUSE US SUCH HEART-ACHE, NOELLE.
OH, NOELLE...
WE CAN'T RISK GOING FARTHER INTO THE FOREST.
SHOOT...
I JUST HAPPENED TO PASS BY, THAT'S ALL.
THANK YOU FOR SAVING MY DAUGHTER.
ARE YOU A TRAV-ELER?
SFX HAHAHAHA
NO WAY!
DEVIL?
WHAT'S THAT?
DO YOU THINK NOELLE WAS KILLED BY THE DEVIL?
Don't agree just because you got too lazy for expla nations.
YES.
POOR THING, FROM WHAT I SEE, YOU LOST A FELLOW TRAVELER, TOO.
THANK YOU.
RUSTLE
THERE'S NO WAY THERE'S SOMEONE DRESSED IN BLACK CAR RYING A COFFIN
THAT'S JUST A FIB WE TOLD KIDS TO STOP THEM FROM GOING INTO THE FOREST

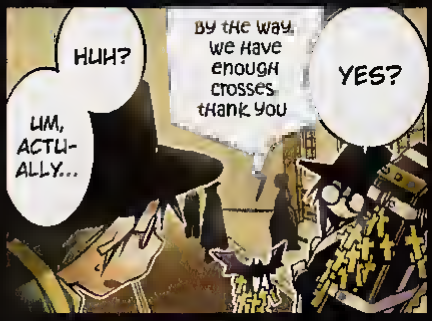
Hey, what's up? You've been looking at your hand since yesterday.
IT'S NOTHING.
They were a pretty interesting group.
OH, YOU'RE AWAKE.
GOOD MORNING, MOM.
YOU SLEPT ALL DAY YESTERDAY, YOU KNOW.
...IS a problem no matter where you go.
WHY don't you just THROW it away?
But you know, that coffin of yours...
SHE LEFT ALREADY.
WHERE DID THE TRAVELER GO?
SO SOON!?
.....
I CAN'T...
...DO THAT.
...BUT SHE TOLD ME THIS MORNING THAT SHE TOOK CARE OF HER BUSINESS
SHE WAS LOOKING AROUND VARIOUS PLACES IN THE VILLAGE YESTERDAY...
OH...
...I'M GOING TO NEED IT.
...BY THE TIME MY JOURNEY ENDS
BECAUSE IF I STAY THIS WAY...
I DIDN'T GET TO ASK...
...FOR HER NAME...

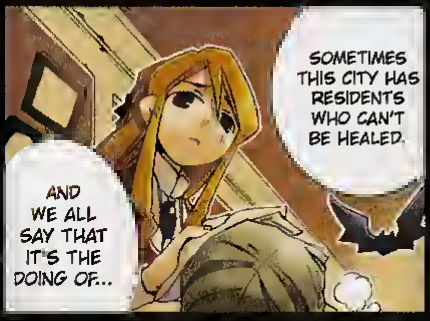
...ARE ALL PRETTY RELIGIOUS.
AND FOR THAT REASON, THE PEOPLE OF THIS CITY...
I SEE. THAT'S WHY...
WHAT AN AMAZING CATHEDRAL.
BEFORE, THERE WAS NOTHING AROUND HERE.
I wonder if we look that unfortunate.
...ALL THE PASSERSBY ARE GIVING ME BLESSINGS AND AMULETS.
HAVE A SAFE TRIP!
I SEE.
...THANKS TO THE SPREAD OF RELIGION.
BUT IT GREW TO BE A BIG CITY...


SHE SUDDENLY FELL ILL ABOUT TWO MONTHS AGO.
THIS IS MY DAUGHTER

UM...
EXCUSE ME.


SO YOU THINK THIS IS THE RESULT OF SOME SPELL?
AND EVEN WITH THE HELP OF THE BISHOP, WE CAN'T CURE HER.


HUH?
UM, ACTUALLY...
By the way, we have enough crosses thank you
YES?

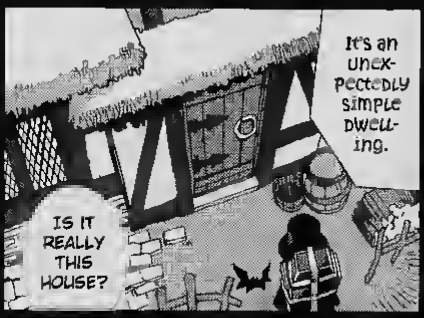

SOMETIMES THIS CITY HAS RESIDENTS WHO CAN'T BE HEALED.
AND WE ALL SAY THAT IT'S THE DOING OF...

...THAT MAYBE YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH UNORTHODOX MAGIC OR WITCHCRAFT.
...UH, I JUST FELT...

...A WITCH...
...WHO LIVES ON THE HILL AT THE EDGE OF THIS CITY.

SO WOULD YOU PLEASE COME TO MY HOUSE?
I CAN'T REALLY EXPLAIN IT WELL...
We've never had someone be so blunt about it.
SO YOU'RE SAYING WE LOOK SUSPICIOUS.

Hey! COULD It be...?
...A WITCH...


It's an unexpectedly simple dwelling.
IS IT REALLY THIS HOUSE?

HUH?
LET'S GO, SEN.
UM, TRAVELER!?
SHE LIVES on the Hill at the edge of this city, right?

OH. UH, YES.
OH? HOW UNUSUAL. ARE YOU A TRAVELER?
I HEARD THAT THERE WAS A WITCH LIVING AROUND HERE...
SHUT UP, SEN.
OOH, SHE'S HOT!

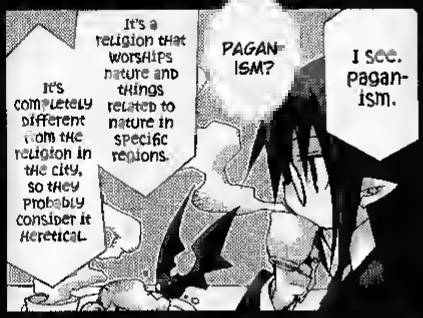
I DON'T KNOW...
IS SHE REALLY GOING TO GO FOR US?
I WONDER WHAT'S GOING ON?
I WONDER IF SHE'S IN THE SAME BUSINESS?

HUH?
THAT'S PROBABLY ME.
OH MY!

...MADE THE MOST TERRIFYING FACE FOR A SECOND.
BUT THAT TRAVELER...

I'M JUST THE DESCENDANT OF A LOCAL FAMILY OF HEALERS.
ALTHOUGH I'M ONLY A WITCH IN NAME. THE PEOPLE FROM THE CITY CALL ME THAT.
PLEASE HAVE A SCONE.

.....
PLEASE! COME IN.


I see. paganism.
PAGANISM?
It's a religion that worships nature and things related to nature in specific regions.
It's completely different from the religion in the city, so they probably consider it heretical.

WELL, I NEVER HAVE GUESTS! ♡
A tea party... it seems.
WHAT IS THIS?
COULD YOU PLEASE TAKE OFF YOUR HAT AND COFFIN?

It's along those lines.
OH, YEAH.
In our hometown we had an old lady who knew about old legends and traditional healing right?
LIKE "OLD LADY WISDOM."
Just think of paganism as a little more ritualistic.

YES.
WHY?
YOU'RE... a witch, right?
UM I'M GOING TO ASK AGAIN

.....
RITUALISTIC?
OH LOOK MY LEAVES ARE IN THE SHAPE OF A STAR SOMETHING GOOD IS GOING TO HAPPEN TODAY! ♡
ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH TEA LEAF FORTUNE-TELLING?
IT'S MORE LIKE LITTLE GIRLS' FORTUNE TELLING.

It's even tougher when she apologizes about it...
I'M SORRY, DID I NOT MEET YOUR EXPECTATIONS?
OH, REALLY?
I'M JUST SURPRISED THAT IT'S YOU...

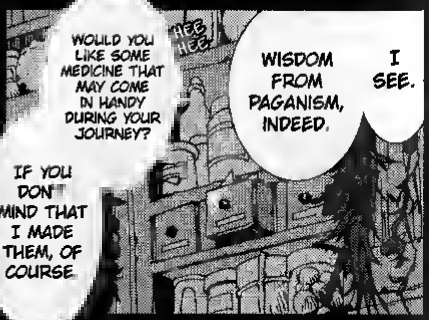
YOU TWO SURE HAVE A MYSTERIOUS AIR ABOUT YOU.
BY THE WAY, BLACK TRAVELER-SAN?

DO TELL ME IF YOU DON'T LIKE THEM.
I ADDED SOME OF THE HERBS THAT GROW IN MY GARDEN.
...HAVE AN INTERESTING TASTE.
AH, THE TEA AND SNACKS...
IT'S GOOD.

I'M ONLY SAYING WHAT I FEEL, SO IT'S ABSTRACT
WELL, ACTUALLY...
YOU MEAN, WE LOOK FISHY?
OH, SHE'S STILL MAD ABOUT THE EARLIER INCIDENT.

HERBS?
YES.
HEALERS ARE FAMILIAR WITH MEDICINES DERIVED FROM NATURE.

IT'S LIKE SOMEONE ELSE TAINTED YOUR TRUE COLOR WITH ANOTHER SHADE.
IT'S THAT'S IT. I FEEL THAT THE BLACK YOU WEAR...
...WAS FORCED ON YOU AND ISN'T YOUR TRUE COLOR.


WOULD YOU LIKE SOME MEDICINE THAT MAY COME IN HANDY DURING YOUR JOURNEY?
HEE HEE.
WISDOM FROM PAGANISM, INDEED.
I SEE.
IF YOU DON'T MIND THAT I MADE THEM, OF COURSE.

WAS I ABLE TO SAY SOMETHING JUST A LITTLE WITCH-LIKE, I WONDER?
HEE-HEE.
You can tell?
.....

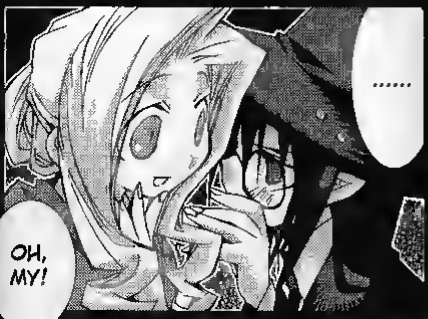
THAT MAY BE A LITTLE DIFFICULT.
AND POISON THAT CAN KILL BATS, TOO, PLEASE.
How about an aphrodisiac that'll make a woman fall in love with me instantly?
HMMM.

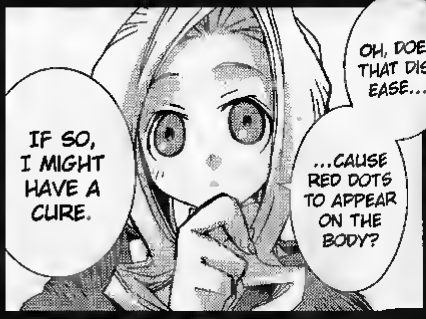
GOOD-BYE, SEN-SAN AND...
I'M SORRY, WHAT WAS YOUR NAME?
THANK YOU.
THANKS FOR THE TEA.
THEN I'LL LET THEM KNOW.

...DIDN'T YOU COME HERE BECAUSE YOU NEEDED SOMETHING?
OH, BUT...
I HAD SO MUCH FUN TODAY!
OH...

I'D LIKE TO KNOW. WON'T YOU PLEASE TELL ME?
OH, I'M SURE THAT'S NOT TRUE
...'COS IT DOESN'T SUIT HER.
SHE HASN'T TOLD ANYONE HER REAL NAME...
UH, MY NA-
.....
SEN!

AND EVERYONE'S SAYING THAT IT WAS CAUSED BY A WITCH'S CURSE.
THERE'S A CHILD IN TOWN WITH AN INCURABLE DISEASE
YES
OH, MY.
ME?


.....
OH, MY!


OH, DOES THAT DISEASE...
...CAUSE RED DOTS TO APPEAR ON THE BODY?
IF SO, I MIGHT HAVE A CURE.

I HAVEN'T SEEN HER ACT THIS GIRLY IN A LONG TIME.
OH, WEIRD.
BUT IT'S A LOVELY NAME!
IS THAT WHY YOU DON'T LIKE IT?
HOW UNUSUAL
HOW CUTE!

I DIDN'T CAST A CURSE.
OH, PLEASE DON'T MISUNDERSTAND.
.....

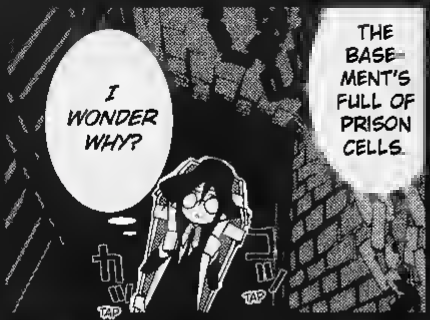
HERE I HAVE A RECIPE FOR A MEDICINE YOU CAN GIVE HER.
THERE'S A FASTER WAY TO CURE HER.
YES.
IF IT'S A CHILD WITH STRONG NERVES, IT'S ALMOST DEFINITELY
HUH!?
A NEUROTIC DISORDER... "SPIRIT FEVER"?
UH... OKAY.
I GOT IT FROM A FRIEND. PLEASE TRY IT.
THEN I'M OFF.
BUT WE'VE NEVER HEARD OF THIS DISEASE UNTIL NOW.
ORIGINALLY IT WAS A DISEASE RELATED TO THE CLIMATE OF THIS REGION
THERE WAS A TIME WHEN MANY CAUGHT THIS AFFLICTION AND LOST THEIR LIVES
I DON'T KNOW ANY OF THE INGREDIENTS IN THIS RECIPE
UM... WAIT!
AND THERE'S NO ONE IN TOWN WHO CAN MAKE THIS
YOUR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS ARE PROBABLY GIVING YOU A SENSE OF MENTAL WELL-BEING.
IT'S PROBABLY THANKS TO "THAT."
WELL, THEN...
GOOD-BYE.
YES, THERE IS.
THE WITCH LIVING AT THE EDGE OF TOWN.
You're going to lecture a kid who's bedridden and heaving?
THEN WE SHOULD TAKE HER TO THE CHURCH AND HAVE THE PRIEST GIVE HER A SERMON!
AH, RELIGIOUS BELIEFS!

D-DO YOU THINK IT'S OKAY? WON'T THE WITCH KILL US?
WE CAN'T TURN BACK NOW. COME ON.
WHO KNOWS?
DO YOU think they'll go to the witch?
I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH THEY TRUST ME.
Yeah
She was just labeled a witch 'cos her beliefs differed from those of the towns people
BUT I CAN'T BELIEVE THERE ARE GOOD WITCHES LIKE HER
KNOCK KNOCK
.....
YEAH
Well, in the end, she wasn't the "witch" we were looking for.
YES?
WHO IS IT?
I HAVE A LOT OF GUESTS TODAY
OH MY
IT SEEMS...
...THAT WE'VE GOT A LONG WAY YET TO TRAVEL

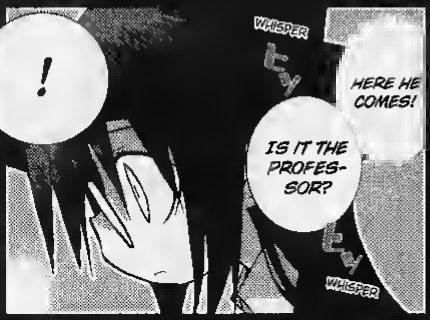
I WONDER WHAT'S WRONG?
DO YOU THINK THEY CAN'T LEAVE THIS PLACE?
They won't turn into ash if they go into the sun, right?
I guess they've never really stepped outside.
They're hesitating.
Or are they scared stiff?
IT'S OKAY.
COME ON.
LET'S GO.
One hand isn't enough, "Kuro..."
...since there are two of them.

LIFT
I SEE.
THEN I SHOULD DO THIS BEFORE IT GETS DARK.
Thirty-eight times on the hourglass and the sun set 53 degrees
BUT STILL NO REPLY.
KNOCK
AND THAT'S MY 119TH KNOCK.
KNOCK
HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE MY FIRST KNOCK?
THERE'S A PILE OF MAIL AND NOTES ON THE STOOP
HUH!?
Wai—
Hey!!
CRASH

...?
TWITCH
...JUST 'COS YOU'RE INTERESTED IN HIS RESEARCH.
YEAH, WELL...
OH. NO. YOU'RE UNUSUALLY AGGRESSIVE...
HEY, HEY, WAKE UP.
HMM?
...I MIGHT FIND A CLUE TO UNDO THIS.
THERE AREN'T THAT MANY SCIENTISTS WHO STUDY THE OCCULT
WELL, TRUE, BUT...
EVEN IF HE'S NOT HERE...
I HEARD A SOUND JUST NOW.
WHAT KIND OF SOUND?
THE SOUND OF SOMETHING.
WHAT'RE YOU GONNA DO IF THERE'S SOMEONE INSIDE...
...OR IF HE COMES HOME?
LET'S SEE...
A SUSPICIOUS TRAVELER INSIDE HIS HOME
NO. WELL...
I GUESS I GET IT, BUT ISN'T THIS ILLEGAL?
BUT IT'S...
...PROBABLY PROFESSOR'S SOUND.
YOU'RE THAT WILLING TO SELL ME OUT, EH?
IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.
NO WAY!
OR MAYBE TO BE...
...I'LL BE A SALESPERSON OF BAT SPECIMENS... FOR EXPERIMENTS.
WELL, IF I CAN'T SAY I'M A TRAVELER...


I WONDER WHY?
THE BASEMENT'S FULL OF PRISON CELLS.
TAP
TAP

WE'LL BE EFFICIENT...
LET'S SEARCH THE MANSION.


!
WHISPER
HERE HE COMES!
IS IT THE PROFESSOR?
WHISPER

FLAP
CAN YOU GUYS SPLIT UP AND CHECK EACH ROOM?
GIVE ME ANY INFORMATION THAT MIGHT LEAD US TO SOMETHING.
FLAP

WA-WAH!
IS SOMEONE THERE?

OOPS, YOU CAUGHT ME.
SORRY. THEN WHERE SHOULD I LOOK?
YOU always try to make me do all the work.
YOU SHOULD stop being lazy and search, too!
AND YOU TREAT ME HORRIBLY HOT BOOT.
SFX GRUMBLE GRUMBLE

YOU CHOSE THE MOST DANGEROUS SPOT FOR ME, DIDN'T YOU?
CREEEAK
THE basement.
You can start here.

WHAT WEIRD PRONUN-CIATION.
YOUR NAMES?
SANJU.
WHO ARE YOU KIDS?
NIJUKU.

.....

.....?
THE PROFES-SOR GAVE THEM TO US.
THEY'RE NOT WEIRD.

KIDS?

!
SO HE GAVE US SPECIAL NAMES.
WE'RE THE PRO-FESSOR'S EXPERI-MENTS.

.....
IT'S A PERSON IN PITCH BLACK.
IT'S NOT HIM.
IT'S NOT THE PROFES-SOR.

NIJUKU AND SANJU...
...EH?
I SEE.

.....
WHAT SHOULD I DO?
DISAP-POINTED IT'S BLACK.
WHAT A DISAP-POINT-MENT

ANYWAY, I SHOULD LET YOU KIDS OUT.
OUT?
CAN WE REALLY GO OUT?
WE SAID OUR NAMES!
YOUR TURN NOW!
THEN WE'RE GOING OUT.
DAAASH!
!?
FOOP
PERSON IN PITCH BLACK.
BLACK PERSON-SAN.
WHO ARE YOU?
.....
THEY VANISHED?
NIJUKU? SANJU?
OVER HERE.
WE'RE HERE.
SINCE...
...I'M IN ALL BLACK...
MY NAME'S KURO...
...I GUESS?
KURO-CHA.
OVER HERE.
WHOA!?
TINY
WHAT A WEIRD NAME.
BUT IT'S PERFECT.
YEAH.
I THINK SO, TOO.
KURO-CHA?
KURO-CHAN?

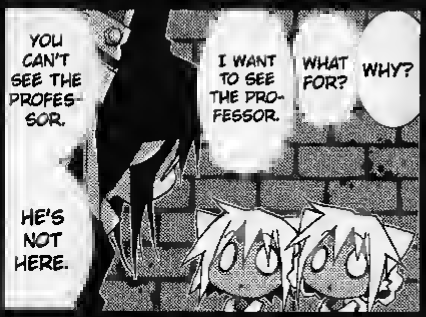
SOMETHING CAME
WHAT'S UP?
OH, SEN.
What are you doing here?
KURO-CHAN, CLAP!
BACK TO NORMAL.
.....
OH YEAH
!?
I came to check up on you 'cos you were taking so long.
I'LL THINK ABOUT HOW YOU DID THAT LATER.
PROFESSOR USED TO CLAP WHEN WE DID THIS
HEY HEY WHERE'S OUR APPLAUSE?
IF YOU COULD GET OUT HOW COME YOU DIDN'T BEFORE?
HUH?
IT'S THE DANGEROUS THING!!
...AND TO WAIT HERE WHERE IT'S SAFE.
...THAT IT WILL BE DANGEROUS FOR A WHILE...
BECAUSE THE PROFESSOR SAID...
WH-WHAT'S GOING ON!?
WHOA!!?
PROFESSOR, COME BACK!
WAAAAH! DANGEROUS THING, GO AWAY!
Hey, can you at least try to help me here!?
GOOD WORK
WAAAAH
?
?
IS HE STILL IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS DANGEROUS THING?
BUT HE HASN'T COME BACK YET

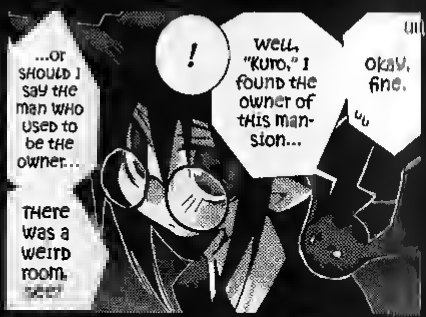
.....
...and were probably waiting for their master to come back for a long time.
But these kids didn't know anything...

There're so many things I wanna say but I don't know where to start.
BUT THERE'S ONE LEFT.
REALLY, KURO-CHAN?
DON'T WORRY THEY'RE GONE NOW.
THAT'S THE MOST OBNOXIOUS ONE BUT IT'S REALLY WEAK.

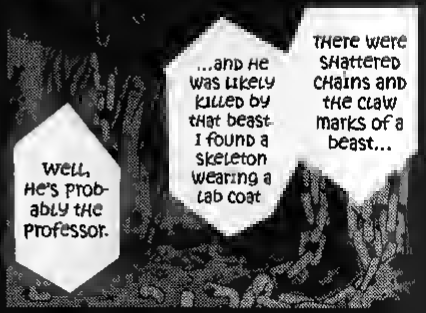
UNFORTUNATELY THE PROFESSOR WENT TO A DIFFERENT WORLD.
NIJUKU, SANJU.

TO THESE KIDS, I'M "KURO."
IT'S MY NAME.
WHAT'S THIS "KURO-CHAN" THING?
HUH?
...??

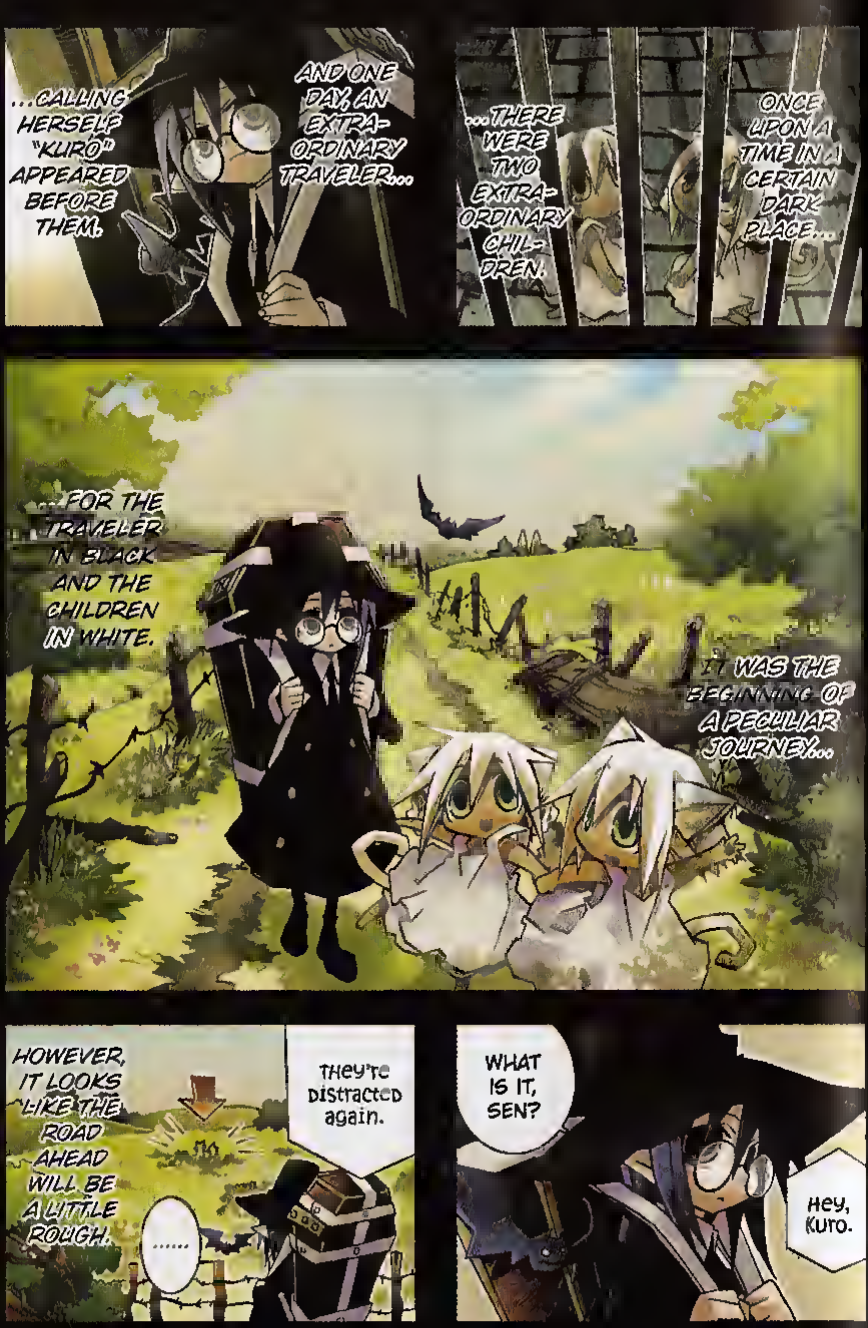

YOU CAN'T SEE THE PROFESSOR.
HE'S NOT HERE.
I WANT TO SEE THE PROFESSOR.
WHAT FOR?
WHY?

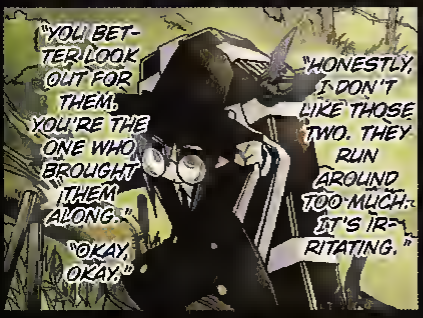

...OR SHOULD I SAY THE MAN WHO USED TO BE THE OWNER...
THERE WAS A WEIRD ROOM.
!
WELL, "KURO," I FOUND THE OWNER OF THIS MANSION...
UH...
OKAY, FINE.

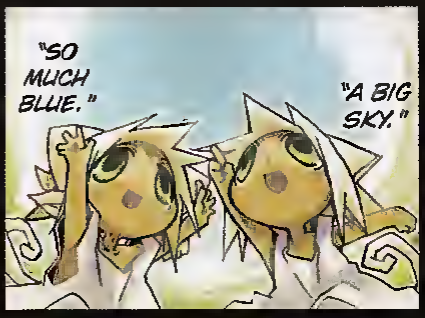
SO...
THEN...
...WHERE DO WE GO TO SEE HIM?


WELL, HE'S PROBABLY THE PROFESSOR.
...AND HE WAS LIKELY KILLED BY THAT BEAST. I FOUND A SKELETON WEARING A LAB COAT
THERE WERE SHATTERED CHAINS AND THE CLAW MARKS OF A BEAST...

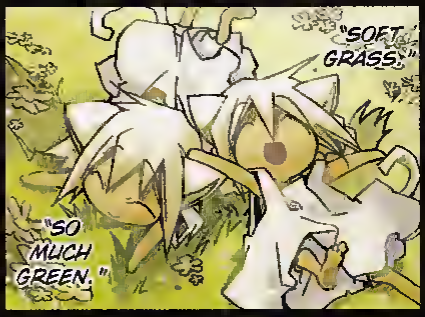
...LIKE US.
SO I'M SURE THEIR LIVES HAVE A PURPOSE.
JUST...
"KUTO" !?
What are you going to do with these two?
OKAY.
FOLLOW ME.
THAT'S WHY...
I DON'T KNOW WHY THESE KIDS WERE MADE...
...BUT THEY WERE BORN INTO THIS WORLD.
DO YOU WANT TO COME WITH US...
...TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD...
...TO FIND THAT PURPOSE?


...CALLING HERSELF "KURO" APPEARED BEFORE THEM.
AND ONE DAY, AN EXTRA-ORDINARY TRAVELER...
...THERE WERE TWO EXTRA-ORDINARY CHIL-DREN.
ONCE UPON A TIME IN A CERTAIN DARK PLACE...
...FOR THE TRAVELER IN BLACK AND THE CHILDREN IN WHITE.
IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF A PECULIAR JOURNEY...
HOWEVER, IT LOOKS LIKE THE ROAD AHEAD WILL BE A LITTLE ROUGH.
.....
They're distracted again.
WHAT IS IT, SEN?
Hey, Kuro.

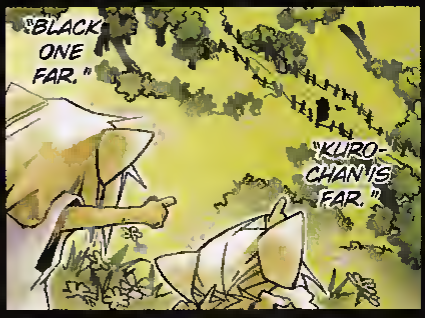

"YOU BETTER LOOK OUT FOR THEM. YOU'RE THE ONE WHO BROUGHT THEM ALONG."
"HONESTLY, I DON'T LIKE THOSE TWO. THEY RUN AROUND TOO MUCH. IT'S IRRITATING."
"OKAY, OKAY."


"SO MUCH BLUE."
"A BIG SKY."

"AH."


"SOFT GRASS."
"SO MUCH GREEN."

"NOW, WHICH ONE ARE YOU? NIJUKU? OR SANJU?"
"FOUND YOU!"
"WHOA!?"
FLAIL
FLAP

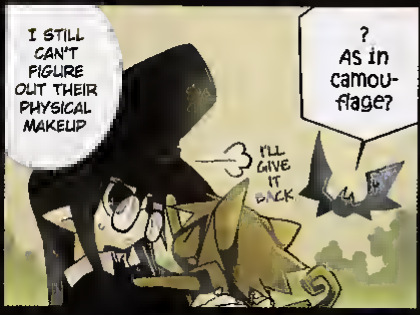

"BLACK ONE FAR."
"KURO-CHAN IS FAR."

Actually, who is this?

"DON'T KNOW. WHY DON'T YOU RAISE A 'WHITE' FLAG?"
"...OKAY, SEN. WHERE ARE THE TWO 'WHITE' FLAGS?"

I GOT THE COLOR FROM THIS TREE.
"GOT THE COLOR"?

HEEHEE, YOU'RE RIGHT.
UMM... NI-JUKU?


I STILL CAN'T FIGURE OUT THEIR PHYSICAL MAKEUP
? As in camou-flage?
I'LL GIVE IT BACK

SHE'S not DIRTY exact-LY.. IT'S more LIKE she was DYED brown
IT'S NOT MUD.
WHAT HAP-PENED?
YOU'RE COVERED IN MUD.

.....
...the green thing over there is...
So that means...

So maybe they got sunburned
They probably never saw the sun.
OH! These kids were in that basement all their lives, right?

RUSTLE
EEK!

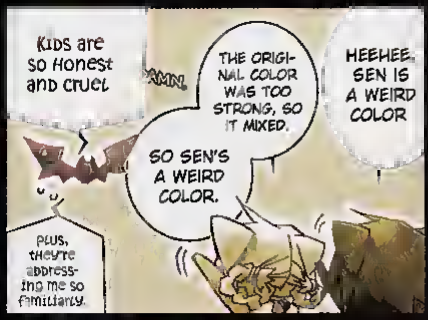
I was kidding.
PUSH
HUH?

PLOP
LIKE THIS.
YEAH.
!?

YEAH.
DID YOU "GET THE COLOR" FROM SOMEWHERE, TOO?
PLUCK

HUH?
WHAT IS THIS!?
GEH!!

LIKE THIS.
SEE?
WHOOSH

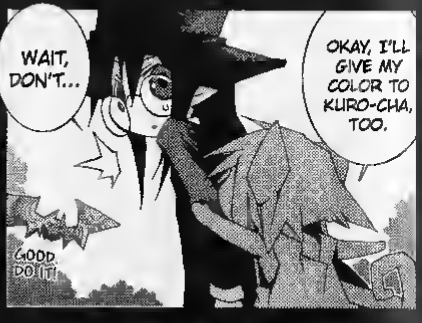

KIDS ARE SO HONEST AND CRUEL
AMN.
THE ORIGINAL COLOR WAS TOO STRONG, SO IT MIXED.
HEEHEE. SEN IS A WEIRD COLOR
SO SEN'S A WEIRD COLOR.
PLUS, THEY'RE ADDRESSING ME SO FAMILIARLY.

WOW. PRETTY AMAZING.
TAP
.....
I'VE GOT A QUESTION.

GO AHEAD AND LAUGH IN MY FACE.
IT'S OKAY, KUTO.
HOLDING IT IN IS BAD FOR YOU.

...DO THE OPPOSITE OF THAT AS WELL?

BUT I TURNED BLACK.
I WANTED TO MAKE KURO-CHA GREEN
YEAH, BUT WHY?
ARE YOU OKAY?
CLOSE YOUR EYES
HMM...
DRIBBLE


WAIT, DON'T...
OKAY, I'LL GIVE MY COLOR TO KURO-CHA, TOO.
GOOD. DO IT!

IT'S A COLOR THAT CAN'T BE BRIGHT LIKE YOU TWO.
NO MATTER WHAT COLOR YOU MIX WITH BLACK PAINT, IT TURNS BLACK.
THAT'S BECAUSE I'M BLACK.

OH?
SEE?
Hm...

THAT'S WHY YOU MUSTN'T DO THIS TO ME OR SEN AGAIN
NOW GO WASH OFF AT THAT WELL.

HUH?
HUH?
FWOOSH

NO. SHE'S actually pretty depressed.
WAS SHE HAPPY?
KURO-CHAN WAS SORT OF SMILING.

NIJU-KU!?
POOF
WHOa. SHE'S PITCH BLACK!

BECAUSE SHE'S BLACK?
UM... HMMM...
HEY, SANJU.
WHY WOULD KURO-CHAN BE DEPRESSED?
...WAS FORCED ON YOU, AND ISN'T YOUR TRUE COLOR. IT'S LIKE SOMEONE ELSE TAINTED YOUR TRUE COLOR WITH ANOTHER SHADE.
YES, THAT'S IT. I FEEL THAT THE BLACK YOU WEAR...
...
IF SHE'S BLACK, SHE STAYS BLACK.
DO YOU NEED MORE WHITE?
NO, THANKS.
I BET...
...KURO-CHAN DOESN'T WANT TO BE BLACK.
BUT NOT FOR THAT REASON.
YEAH.
SHE WAS HOT.
YOU'RE REMEMBERING THE WITCH WE MET BEFORE, HUH?
NIJUKU IS WHITE, TOO.
SANJU IS WHITE.
ALTHOUGH YOU TURNED A BIT BLACK
I FEEL DISGUSTED
MY HANDS TURNED NIJUKU PITCH BLACK SO QUICKLY.
.....
...I MIGHT TURN THEM BLACK AGAIN.
IF I STAY WITH THEM...
YEAH... WELL, THEY DID TURN ME INTO A MARBLE COLOR TOO.

.....
NIJUKU, SANJU.
KURO-CHAN WON'T CHANGE.
BUT YOU WON'T CHANGE.

THERE YOU ARE.
KURO-CHA.
SFX. PATTER PATTER PATTER

YOU CAN'T DO THIS TO SEN AND ME!!
I JUST TOLD YOU!!
FLINCH

?
HYAH!
HYAH!
PUSH
PUSH

IF YOU DO IT AGAIN, I'M GOING TO LEAVE YOU TWO.
IF YOU'RE NOT CAREFUL YOU MIGHT TURN BLACK AGAIN.

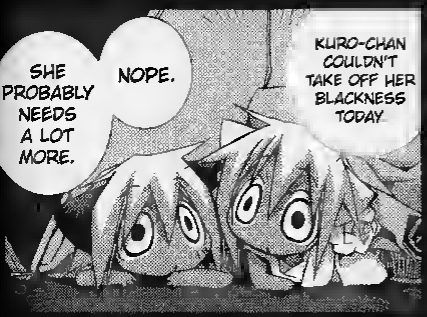
HM!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
HNN!

.....
KURO-CHAN WAS REALLY UPSET.
YEAH, SHE WAS.
ACTU-ALLY...
...SHE WAS REALLY HAPPY.
SHE'S JUST HARD TO READ.

WE'RE GIVING
WE'RE GIVING OUR WHITE...
...TO KURO-CHAN.

SPARKLY, SHINY DOTS!
REALLY BLACK SKY!

SIGH.
THEY CAUSED US LOTS OF GRIEF TODAY.
YEAH, ALTHOUGH IT'S BEEN LIKE THAT EVER SINCE WE PICKED THEM UP

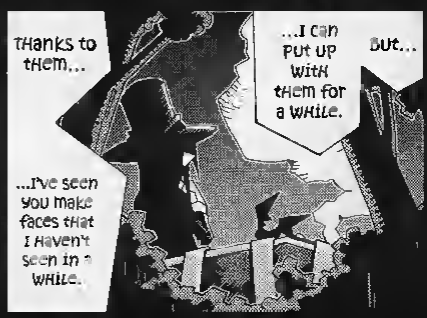

SHE PROBABLY NEEDS A LOT MORE.
NOPE.
KURO-CHAN COULDN'T TAKE OFF HER BLACKNESS TODAY.

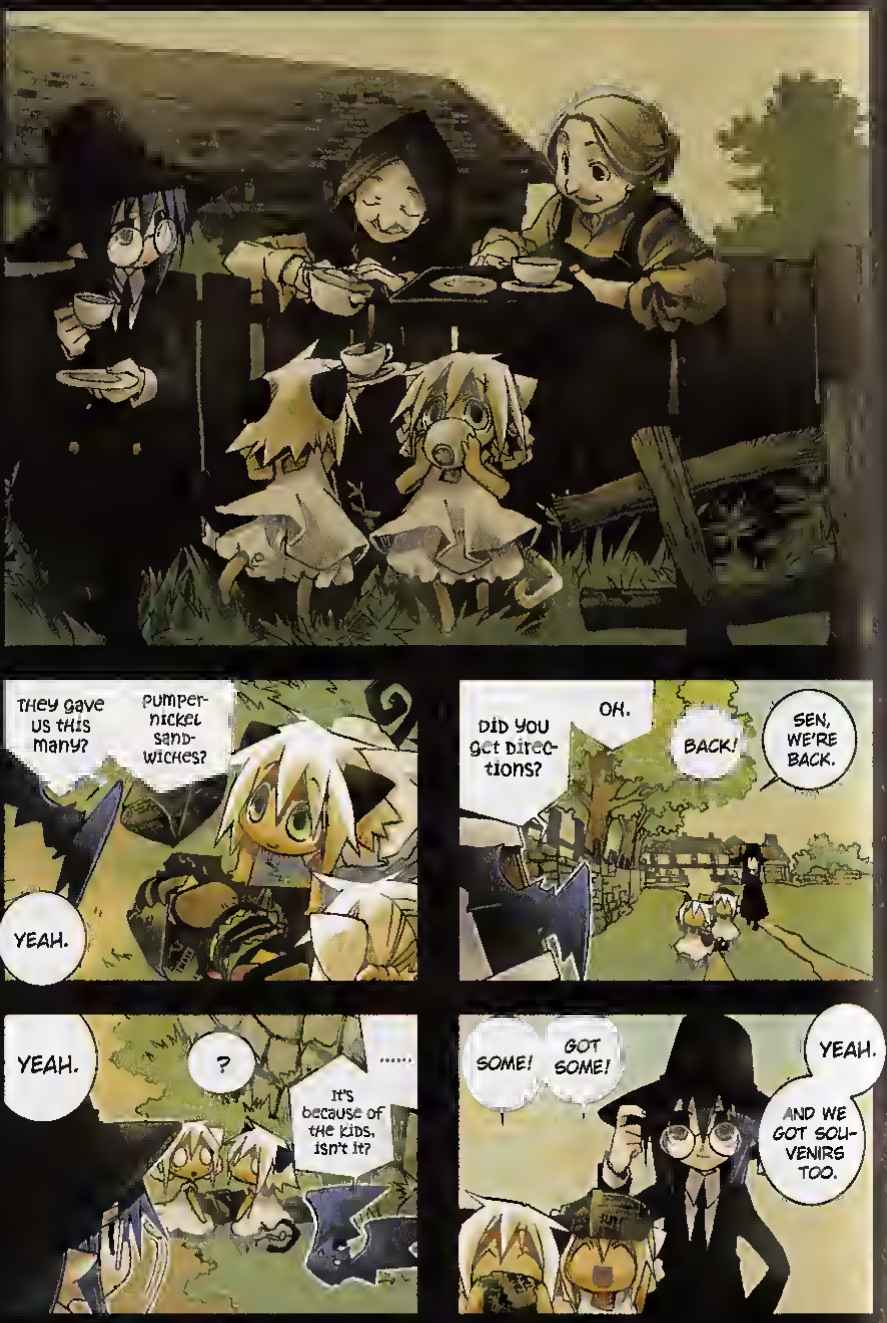
HMM.
I'M NOT REALLY SURE MYSELF.
Kuro ...
...Are you going to keep them around forever?

MORE?
YEAH, MORE WHITE.
LIKE THE SHINY DOTS UP THERE.

Of course, I'm not happy about it.
YOU'RE PROBABLY GOING TO HAVE TO DEAL WITH THEM FOR A LONG TIME.
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
SFX: BLUNTLY

OKAY.
THEN WE SHOULD KEEP TRYING...
...TO MAKE KURO-CHAN WHITE.


Thanks to them...
...I've seen you make faces that I haven't seen in a while.
...I can put up with them for a while.
But...


They gave us this many?
Pumpernickel sandwiches?
YEAH.
Did you get directions?
OH.
BACK!
SEN, WE'RE BACK.
YEAH.
?
.....
It's because of the kids, isn't it?
SOME!
GOT SOME!
YEAH.
AND WE GOT SOUVENIRS TOO.

For example, "200 villagers started a riot to protest settlement."
...knowing what's going on in the world will come in handy during our journey.
But still...

Oh, give me that paper.

That's bad news to be educating them with.
Wow.
"Unidentified corpse found in canal. Weapon of choice was an axe."
Hey.

Well, I'm sure you kids can't understand.
I'm eating information.
The sandwiches taste better.
Sen, you're eating that?

What's this?

So, it knows where the professor is, too?
It knows things you guys don't know.
There's a lot of information about the world in newspapers.

Sorry, but I'm still alive.
No, but maybe in a few days.
Is that written in the "newspaper" too?

It's sweet.
...Can I have that cream sandwich too?

WELL, I SHOULD GET TO WORK.
YOU GUYS CAME HERE FOR THE SAME REASON RIGHT?
?
ARE YOU ALSO A TRAVELER?
NO.
I'M MORE LIKE A WANDERER.
I GO WHEREVER I PLEASE.
GC GDLE
GC GDLE
THIS TOWN'S SAFE AND THE STANDARD OF LIVING'S HIGH.
KIND, RICH TOWNSPEOPLE LIVE HERE.
SORRY I ATE ALL YOUR FOOD.
IT'S EMPTY.
IT'S FINE.
I'M SURE THE WIVES AT THE FARM KNEW WE'D BUMP INTO YOU.
I SEE.
IT'S A FAMOUS PLACE FOR HAVE-NOTS TO MAKE A LITTLE MONEY.
OH, THAT?
I FOUND IT.
ISN'T THIS AN ARMY BIKE?
IT HAS GUNS ON IT.
FOR A WANDERER, YOU SURE HAVE A NICE RIDE.
WHAT?
SO LET'S GO.
AND THEY'D BE MORE GENEROUS IF WE HAD KIDS AROUND.
GO?
LET'S GO?
.....
I FOUND THEM.
IT'S ODD FOR KIDS TO BE TRAVELING.
HOW ABOUT YOU GUYS?

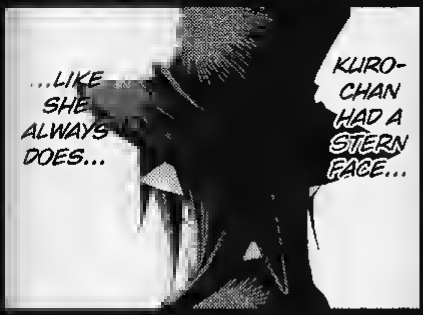
SFX: ROWDY ROWDY

SING?
SING?
BUT IT'S A LITTLE LONELY IF IT'S JUST MUSIC AND DANCING.
CAN YOU GUYS SING, TOO?
YOU'RE RIGHT.
OH, but look.
Those two just got something.
PLEASE DON'T ASK THE KIDS TO DO DIFFICULT THINGS.
IF YOU COULD SING A SAD LOVE SONG ABOUT ARISTOCRATS OR A SONG ABOUT SOLDIERS AND THE KING'S HEAD GETTING CHOPPED OFF, THAT WOULD BE IDEAL
IF YOU SING, IT ATTRACTS MORE PEOPLE THEY LIKE IT
KIDS' CLOTHES, EH?
THEY SAID IT'S "HAND-ME DOWNS."
WHAT'S THIS?
TO BE EXPECTED CONSIDERING WHAT THEY'RE WEARING.
WE DON'T KNOW "SONG."
WHAT'S A SONG?
YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT A SONG IS?
WHAT!?
IF THEY PUT THOSE ON, THEY WON'T LOOK AS PATHETIC!
HEY, DON'T!
AREN'T YOU GLAD?
DO YOU WANT TO WEAR THEM?
WE WEAR THEM?
WEAR?
WHAT IS IT?
WHAT IS A SONG?
IF YOU'RE A TRAVELER, YOU SHOULD KNOW AT LEAST ONE SONG.
SHEESH, HOW USELESS.
Maybe it would've been better if we hadn't saved him.
AT LEAST UNTIL WE MAKE MY LIVING AND FUEL EXPENSES!
UNTIL WE MAKE A DECENT AMOUNT, NO CLOTHES!
HUH?

"I'M NOT TAKING RESPONSIBILITY, WHATEVER HAPPENS."
THAT'S WHAT KURO-CHAN SAID BEFORE SHE STARTED SINGING.

OH!
ARE THERE "SONGS" IN THE NEWSPAPER?
DOES SEN KNOW A "SONG"?
EH!?
Well, I do know some songs, but...
I DON'T SING.

SFX: SPURT
!!
Kuro can sing!!
OH, I know.
REALLY?

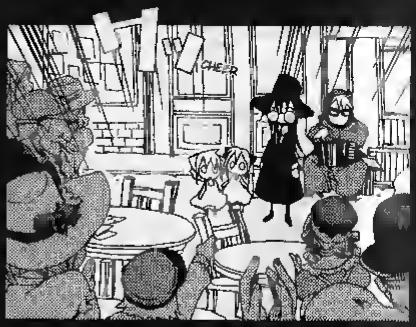

...LIKE SHE ALWAYS DOES...
KURO-CHAN HAD A STERN FACE...

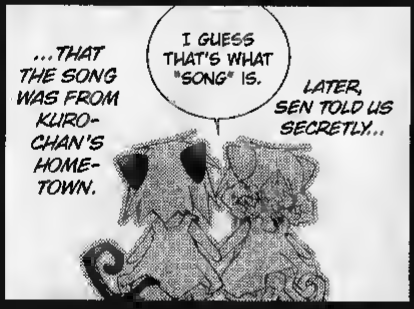
!?
IT'S A COFFIN-CARRYING, FOREIGN SONG REVUE!
OKAY, GATHER AROUND, GATHER AROUND.

...WAS BLOWING AROUND KURO-CHAN.
...BUT DURING THE SONG...
...IT SEEMED LIKE A WEIRD WIND...

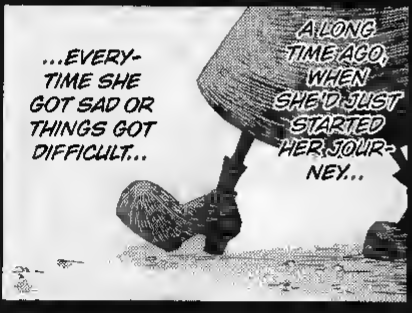
YOU GUYS OWE ME BIG.
.....
SO GOOD LUCK, Kuro.
DON'T WORRY. EVEN IF YOU'RE OFF-KEY, I'LL COVER IT WITH THE ACCORDION.

I FEEL SOMETHING GOING THROUGH MY BODY.
YEAH, I WONDER.
I WONDER WHAT THIS IS.
A REALLY WEIRD FEELING.

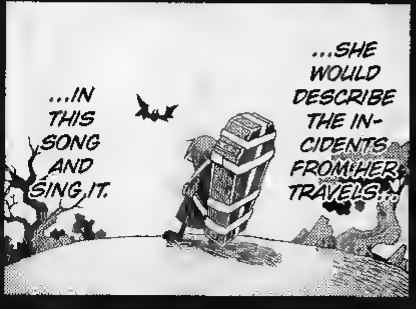

CHEER

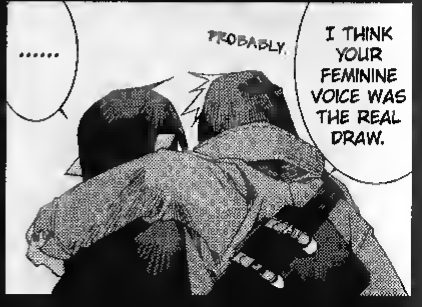

...THAT THE SONG WAS FROM KURO-CHAN'S HOME-TOWN.
I GUESS THAT'S WHAT "SONG" IS.
LATER, SEN TOLD US SECRETLY...

THAT WAS GREAT.
WHERE IS THAT SONG FROM?
WHAT AN INTER-ESTING MELODY.


...EVERY-TIME SHE GOT SAD OR THINGS GOT DIFFICULT...
A LONG TIME AGO, WHEN SHE'D JUST STARTED HER JOUR-NEY...

I DIDN'T THINK IT WOULD TURN OUT THIS WELL.
YOU'RE AWE-SOME!
IT WAS A GOOD SONG.


...IN THIS SONG AND SING IT.
...SHE WOULD DESCRIBE THE IN-CIDENTS FROM HER TRAVELS.


.....
PROBABLY.
I THINK YOUR FEMININE VOICE WAS THE REAL DRAW.

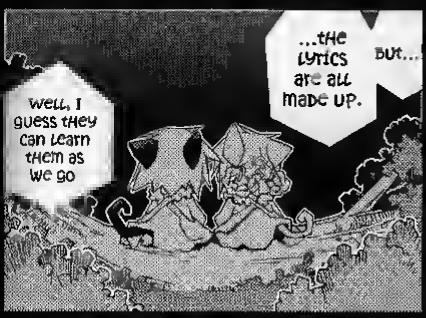
I DON'T WANT THEM TO LEARN ANY MORE TRICKS.
NO.
If we used the kids, we probably could've gotten a place for the night.
We're camping again tonight?

I CAN GET BACK TO WANDERING.
THANKS TO YOU, I GOT CASH AND FUEL.

MY FRIENDS USED TO CALL ME "KEI."
NAME?
We didn't catch your name.

I guess they learned it...
...just by hearing you once.
IS THIS...

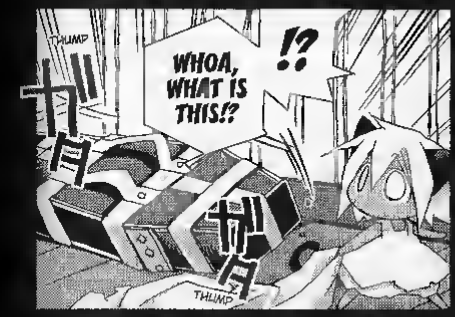
WHEN I POINTED TO SOME RANDOM LETTERS, PEOPLE JUST USED THAT AS MY
YEAH, I DIDN'T HAVE A NAME BEFORE.
KEI?


Well, I guess they can learn them as we go
...the lyrics are all made up.
But...

WHOA HEY...GET OFF...
...let's be sure to make a run for it.
So the next time we hear something about a guy named "Kei..."
SFX WHISPER

The troveler looked on them from ofor ond soid this:

"But I probobly con't do more for them thon the Professor con do now."

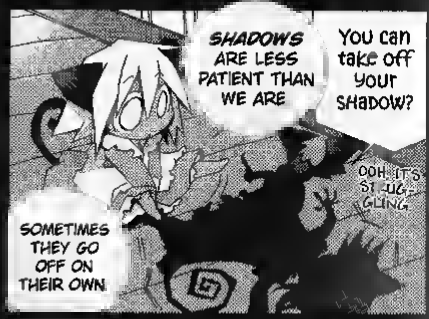

THUMP
WHOA, WHAT IS THIS!?
!?
THUMP

IT'S NOT HERE EITHER.
I CAN'T FIND IT.

WHAT IS IT?
AH! FOUND IT!
MY SHADOW!
SFX FLAP FLAP

WHERE DID I PUT IT?
EH? HUH? HOW WEIRD.
THUMP
THUMP

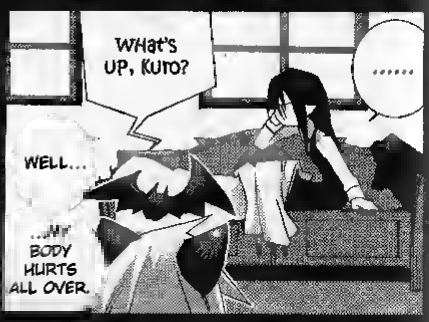
THEY WERE COMING UNDONE, SO I WAS TRYING TO FIX THEM.
Sanju's braids?
And she hated that, I see.


SHADOWS ARE LESS PATIENT THAN WE ARE
You can take off your shadow?
OOH, IT'S STRUGGLING.
SOMETIMES THEY GO OFF ON THEIR OWN.

...is developing as they travel with us, eh?
Her sense of self...
BUT WE CAN'T LEAVE IT MESSY LIKE THAT.

By the way, you should tell us these things ahead of time.
So they really shadow your personalities.
THAT'S WHEN THE SHADOW LEFT
LAST NIGHT WE WERE TOLD TO GO TO BED WHEN WE STILL WANTED TO PLAY MORE
PEANUTS ATTACHED
SHEESH.
STOMP
STOMP

BUT...
DON'T CAUSE PROBLEMS FOR KURO-CHA.
THAT'S RIGHT, SANJU.


What's up, Kuro?
.....
WELL...
...MY BODY HURTS ALL OVER.

SHE'S REALLY GETTING INTO BEING THE OLDER SISTER.
Looks like her sense of self is developing too.
LISTEN TO YOUR OLDER SISTER.
NO BUTS

Did something happen between you and Sanju?
IS IT FROM SOMETHING I DID YESTERDAY?
YOU'RE BEING MEAN

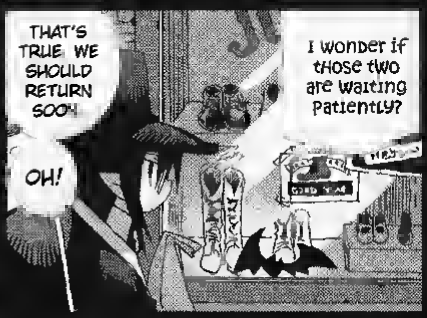
SIT HERE.
GIVE ME YOUR HAND.
DID YOU SLEEP WELL?
NO PROBLEM. I DIDN'T DO MUCH.
THANK YOU FOR LETTING US STAY
WHAT'S THIS?
CANDY.
TRY IT.
THAT'S RIGHT, YOU CAN BUY ANYTHING AT MY STORE.
IS THIS WHAT THEY CALL A "STORE"?
MANY THINGS.
UNFORTUNATELY, NO FANCY DRESSES.
DO YOU HAVE HEXAMINE AND CAN DRESS?
.....
MUNCH
MUNCH
SORRY, THIS PERSON RIGHT HERE IS SAYING NO.
ME TOO!
I WANT SOMETHING TOO!
MAYBE NEXT TIME.
!
PERK
I'M GLAD YOU LIKE IT.
NO, IT'S UP TO THE CASH.
IT'S UP TO KUROCHA?
WHAT?
SFX BLUNTLY

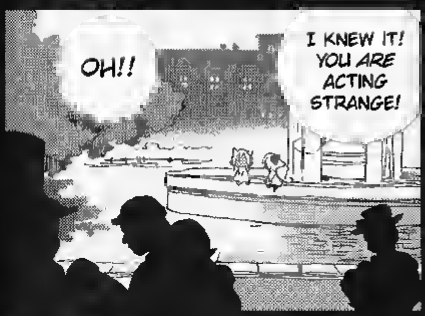
SANJU, YOU'RE ACTING WEIRD.
I JUST WISH THE PROFESSOR WAS HERE.
THAT'S NOT TRUE.
PROFES-SOR?
KURO-CHA, HOW LONG DO WE WAIT?
SO CAN YOU TWO WAIT HERE?
WE HAVE SOME BUSINESS TO TAKE CARE OF.
EH!?
I'VE DECIDED!
I'M NOT GOING TO RELY ON KURO-CHAN.
I'LL TRAVEL ALONE.
I'LL FIND THE PROFESSOR MYSELF.
IF YOU CAN WAIT UNTIL THEN, I'LL GIVE YOU MORE CANDY.
WE'LL BE BACK BY THE TIME THE SKY TURNS RED
OKAY!
OKAY.
I'LL TELL KURO-CHA.
THAT'S WHY I'M GOING.
TAKE CARE.
CAN I HAVE YOUR "CANDY" TOO?
DID YOU UNDER-STAND TOO, SANJU?
I'LL LEAVE AFTER KURO-CHAN COMES BACK
.....
SO NOW they're go-ing through adolescence?
.....
TURN

SANJU, WHY ARE YOU BEING FIDGETY?
.....
I HEARD THE PROFESSOR'S VOICE...
...I THINK.

And there aren't many clues in this town either.
...I BOUGHT THE BANDAGES...

I HEARD IT.
I CAN'T HEAR IT.
?
I SMELL HIM TOO...
...I THINK.


THAT'S TRUE. WE SHOULD RETURN SOON.
I wonder if those two are waiting patiently?
OH!


OH!!
I KNEW IT! YOU ARE ACTING STRANGE!

SANJU?
THAT'S THE PROFESSOR!!
DASH
だっ

You're being nicer now that you know one of them hates you.
THOSE TWO ARE STILL BAREFOOT, HUH?

I ALREADY TOLD THEM...
...THAT THEY "CAN'T SEE PROFESSOR" AND "HE WENT TO A DIFFERENT WORLD."
PANT
PANT
ABOUT WHAT?
When are you going to tell them the truth?
About their professor.
PROFESSOR!
HUG
.....
I HAVE NO INTENTION OF SAYING ANYTHING.
They still believe they can see him again.
SFX TAP TAP TAP
THE REST IS UP TO THEM. THEY NEED TO FIND THE ANSWER FOR THEMSELVES.
THOSE KIDS STILL DON'T KNOW A LOT OF THINGS...
...INCLUDING...
...THE MEANING OF PEOPLE "DYING."
IT'LL...
...PROBABLY TAKE TIME.

SHE LEFT SAYING SHE FOUND THE PROFESSOR.
SANJU LEFT?
BUT IT WASN'T HIM AT ALL.
What happened?

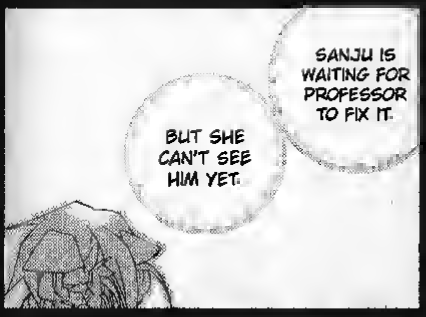
?
MAYBE SHE'S A BEGGAR.
WHO'S THIS KID?
THERE ARE A LOT OF THEM LATELY.

BECAUSE SHE HATES ME?
WHEN SHE REALLY WISHES FOR SOMETHING, SHE THINKS SHE SEES IT.
NO, SANJU LIKES KURO-CHA.
LIKE RIGHT NOW.

IT WASN'T...
...THE PROFESSOR

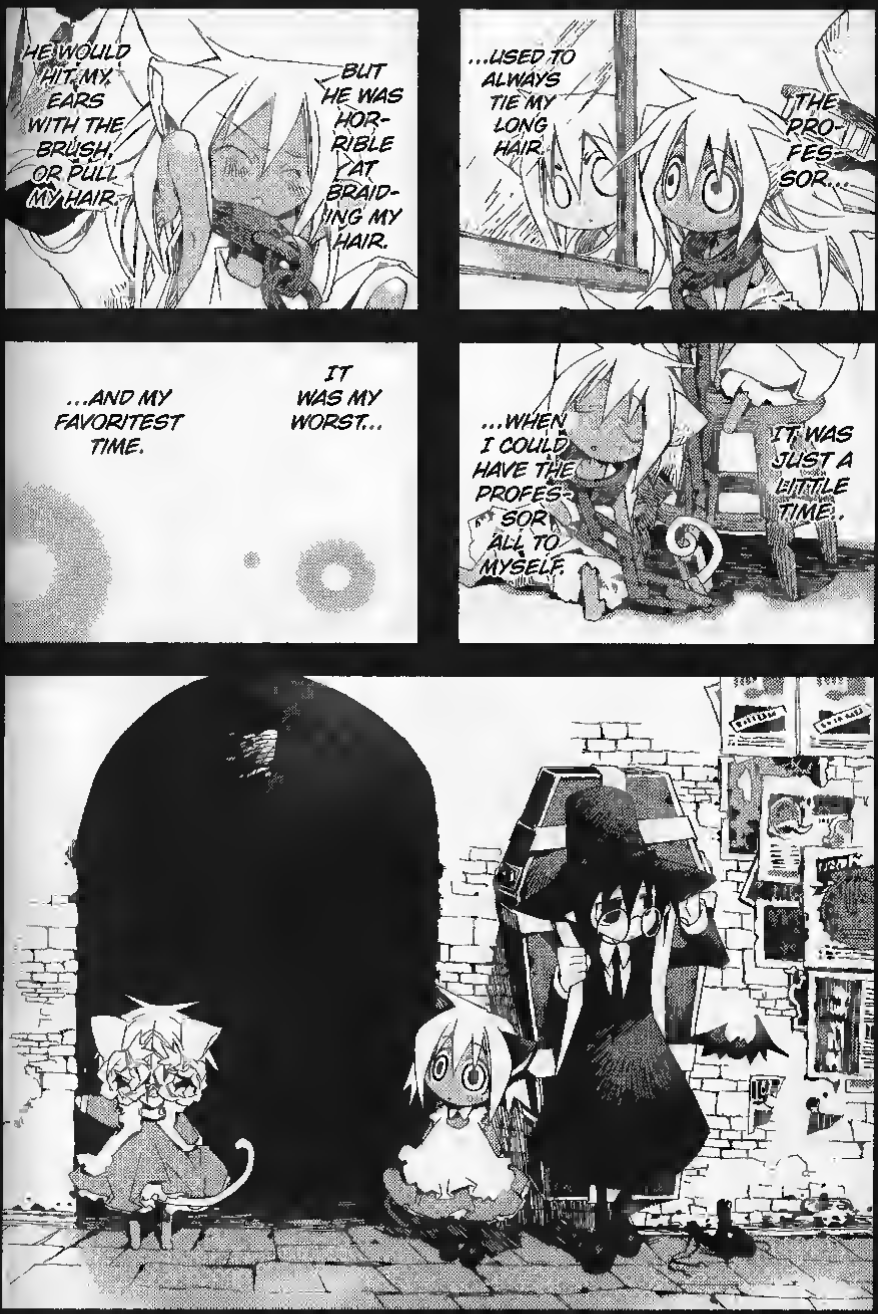
THE PROFESSOR USED TO BRAID HER HAIR.
BUT SHE LIKES THE PROFESSOR MORE.
!

OH NO.
SHE STARTED CRYING.
DAMMIT. HERE, TAKE THIS GOLD COIN.

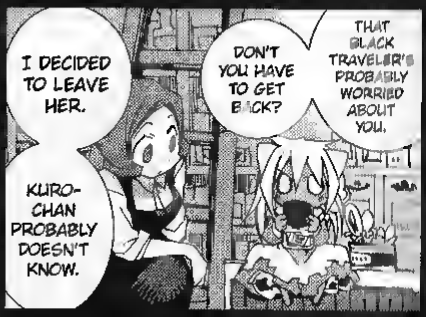

SANJU IS WAITING FOR PROFESSOR TO FIX IT.
BUT SHE CAN'T SEE HIM YET.

JUST HURRY UP AND LEAVE.

HEY, CAN YOU GUYS HOLD UP?
HUH? WHY're YOU walking SO SLOW, KUTO?
.....
OH? WELCOME
I WAS ABOUT TO CLOSE UP.
WELL, ACTUALLY...
...I DON'T KNOW WHY, BUT I FEEL LIKE SOMEONE'S PULLING ME.
HUH!?
OH WELL.
ARE YOU HERE BY YOURSELF?
WHAT CAN I BUY WITH THIS SHINY THING?
HM? WHAT?
!!
OH!
LIKE SOMEONE'S TUGGING ON MY CLOTHES
THEN...
YOU CAN BUY ANYTHING IN THE STORE WITH THIS
MY! WITH THIS?
SANJU?
?
...AND PROFES-SOR.
...CANDY, CANDY...

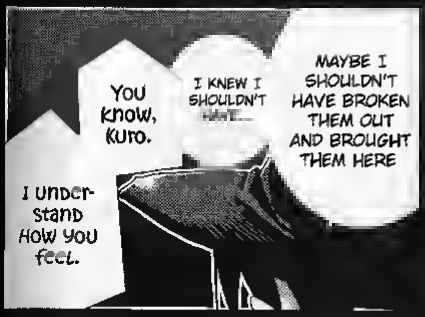

HE WOULD HIT MY EARS WITH THE BRUSH, OR PULL MY HAIR.
BUT HE WAS HORRIBLE AT BRAIDING MY HAIR.
...USED TO ALWAYS TIE MY LONG HAIR.
THE PROFESSOR...
...AND MY FAVORITEST TIME.
IT WAS MY WORST...
...WHEN I COULD HAVE THE PROFESSOR ALL TO MYSELF.
IT WAS JUST A LITTLE TIME..

I thought you were the older sister.
IT'S NOT FAIR.
WELL, AT LEAST WE KNOW SHE'S SAFE.
SHE'S POUTING...


I DECIDED TO LEAVE HER.
DON'T YOU HAVE TO GET BACK?
THAT BLACK TRAVELER'S PROBABLY WORRIED ABOUT YOU.
KURO-CHAN PROBABLY DOESN'T KNOW.

TO TELL THE TRUTH I THOUGHT SHE'D LEAVE TOWN...
...TO FIND THE PROFESSOR.
I THOUGHT SO, TOO.

MUNCH
BUT IT'S DANGEROUS TO TRAVEL BY YOURSELF WHEN YOU'RE SO YOUNG.
I'M GOING TO TRAVEL ON MY OWN NOW.
LET'S SEE...
...IF YOU DON'T WANT TO GO BACK...
MUNCH


YOU KNOW, KURO.
I KNEW I SHOULDN'T HAVE...
MAYBE I SHOULDN'T HAVE BROKEN THEM OUT AND BROUGHT THEM HERE
I UNDERSTAND HOW YOU FEEL.

CHILD?
...HOW ABOUT YOU STAY HERE AND BE MY CHILD FOR A WHILE?
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I'M A CHILD?

But don't say that in front of the kids.

I'LL DO IT!!
YOU CAN EAT ALL THE CANDY AND SNACKS YOU WANT

HM? WHAT'S WRONG?
.....?
I JUST FELT SOMETHING.
PEANUT COOKIES
SHE'S WORRYING ABOUT MAKING UP WITH THAT SANJU OVER THERE
WHAT'S WRONG, KURO-CHAN?
OH!
PHEW
SO IT MUST BE TIME
FOR WHAT?
IT SHOULD BE...
...SANJU OVER HERE!
THEN YOU JUST HAVE TO ASK...
JUST SO YOU KNOW, THE FIRST PERSON SHE ASKED TO HELP HER...
.....
...WAS YOU.
SQUEEZE
SAN-JU...
...CAN YOU TAKE ME TO WHERE YOU ARE?
OH, RIGHT! THE CANDY.

Phew. What a tiring day.
But I'm sure this is going to happen all the time...
...As long as those kids are with us.

I'm glad you finally came for her
I'm sorry she caused you trouble.

But I probably can't do any more for them now than the professor can.
Of course.
You didn't bring them along so you could take the place of the professor.

You can take this.
Don't worry about it. It's already paid for
?
Oh, thank you.

But I think that's fine.
What you can do for them...
...Is show them how to walk on the street or help them change clothes

I'm not going!
I'm a child of this house!
Oh, my.
That makes me happy, but it's not good to be so stubborn.

And scold them about only eating one candy a day
Strictly...

I've never seen a child...
Except for you.
...Who wouldn't smile, even with all the candy in my store.

?
.....

SAN-JU.
ARE YOU SURE?
YEAH!
HURRY UP AND BRAID IT!

HUH?
KURO-CHAN, YOU'RE NOT GOOD AT THIS.
YOU'RE DIFFERENT FROM PRO-FESSOR.

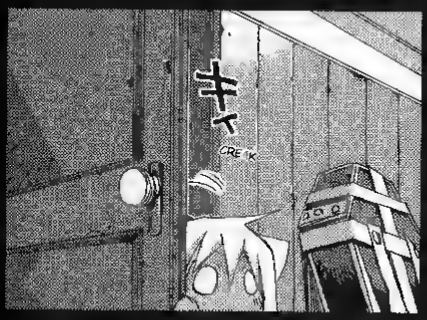
IT'S OKAY!
I'M ALWAYS LIKE THIS WHEN I GET MY HAIR BRAIDED
I HAVE TO PEE.
OKAY. BUT...
...WHY ARE YOU MAKING A FACE?

YOU DON'T SCRATCH MY EARS WITH THE COMB.
AND YOU FINISH SO FAST.

BUT YOU'RE BETTER THAN PRO-FESSOR...
IF IT'S KURO-CHAN, I CAN BEAR IT.
OH, GEEZ.
SANJU.

I SEE.
YOU DIDN'T PULL MY HAIR ONCE...
SORRY, SANJU.
SFX SNIFF SNIFF

SEE, IT'S DONE.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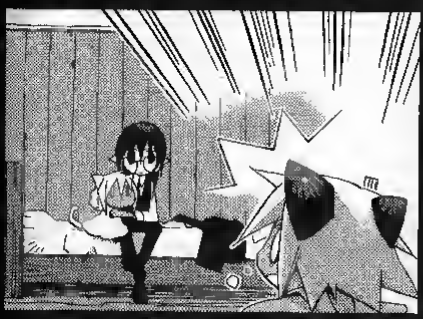
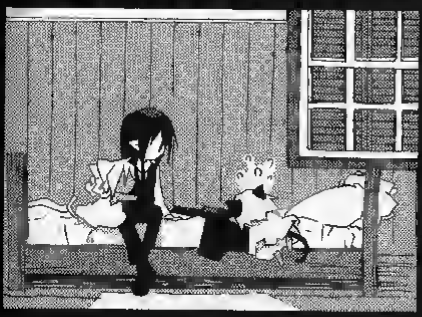
CRE K

KURO-CHAN...
...PROFESSOR DIDN'T LEAVE COS HE DIDN'T NEED ME ANY MORE, DID HE?



I... I...
...I WANT TO SEE HIM...



YEAH.
I KNOW.

IT'S OKAY!
I thought you were the big sister?

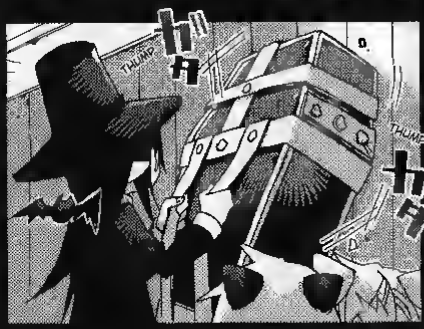
I KNOW, SANJU.

OKAY, LET'S GO.
DID YOU GET EVERY-THING?
YEAH!
THE SHADOW IS GONE AGAIN.

You're organizing your stuff now?
YEAH.
I THOUGHT I SHOULD DO IT BE-FORE I GO TO BED.

THE SHADOW?
YEAH.
DO YOU Have any idea where it is?

I BOUGHT A LOT OF STUFF TODAY.
ALTHOUGH THE SHOPPING WAS CUT SHORT...
AND I NEED TO HIDE THE CANDY FROM THE KIDS.
AHAHA, that's true.


THUMP
THUMP

...OH!
OH! I FORGOT ABOUT THESE

YOU... two...
THUMP
...THE CANDY.
OH, YEAH, THIS IS WHERE I HID...
THUMP
SCURRY

It's one more thing you can do for them.

I HAVE COFFEE, BUT...
I'LL ALSO HAVE SOME COFFEE BEANS AND CANDY.
OH, WELCOME, BELLI-SAN.
WOULD YOU LIKE BREAD AND THREAD?
...I'M SORRY, I ONLY HAVE THIS MUCH CANDY TODAY.
OH, MY.
IT'S UNUSUAL FOR YOU TO RUN OUT OF CANDY.
DID SOME-ONE BUY IT ALL?
UM, IS THIS THE PLACE?
HELLO. I'VE GOT A DELIVERY.
OH, PERFECT TIMING.
BELLI-SAN, WOULD YOU MIND WAIT-ING A BIT?

I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE A LONELIER FUNERAL.
BUT I GUESS HE WAS WELL LIKED.
THE STORY STARTS A LITTLE WHILE BACK.
A PERSON WHO MET A WITCH?
YES.
I HEARD THERE WAS SOMEONE AROUND HERE...
BUT BE CAREFUL.
THAT OLD MAN'S PRETTY ECCENTRIC.
I'D THINK THE ONLY PERSON WHO WOULD SAY THAT IS THE OLD MAN FROM THE IVY-COVERED MANSION
OH, THAT'S WHY YOU HAVE TWINS WITH YOU.
?
MORE PECULIAR THAN THIS ONE?
UH, ABOUT EVEN.
HEY.
THEN THE OLD MAN MUST BE REALLY WEIRD.

...AREN'T YOU TWO MARIE AND MARY?
OH!? NOW THAT I LOOK CLOSER...
?

THIS MANSION MUST BE IT
Let's hope we find something this time.

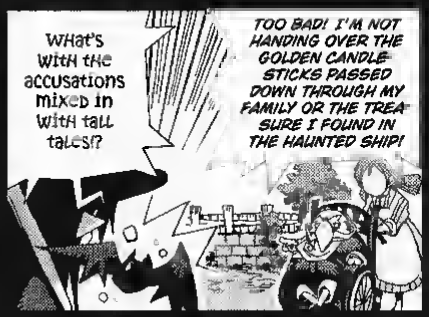
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?
AND I'M NOT MARY.
I'M NOT MARIE.
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN YOUR OWN FATHER'S FACE?

HALT, YOU SUSPICIOUS BUNCH!!
HUH?

He sure is a weird man, as we heard.
??
COME OVER HERE AND LET ME TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT YOU.

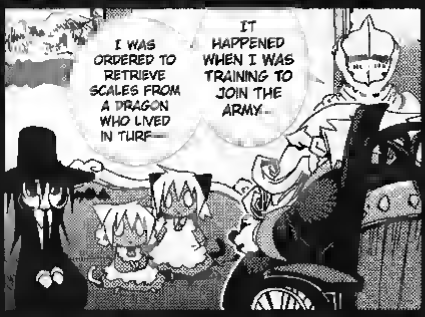
YOU'RE PRETENDING TO BE A MORTICIAN TO CON MONEY OUT OF ME, RIGHT?
I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE UP TO!

I think he's more mentally unstable than weird.
MARY, YOUR TAIL HAS GROWN SO MUCH.

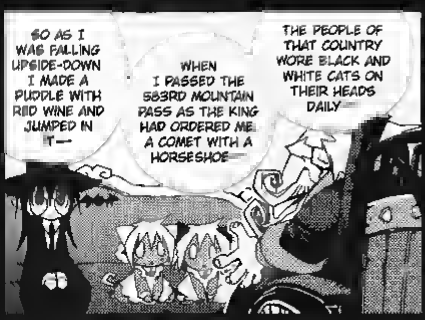

What's with the accusations mixed in with tall tales!?
TOO BAD! I'M NOT HANDING OVER THE GOLDEN CANDLE STICKS PASSED DOWN THROUGH MY FAMILY OR THE TREASURE I FOUND IN THE HAUNTED SHIP!

OH! HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT SECRET!?
WE HEARD THAT YOU MET A WITCH.
Let's get to the point, Kuro.
FINE. I'LL TELL YOU THE STORY EXCLUSIVELY

WOW.
SO MANY WEIRD THINGS.
SO MANY.

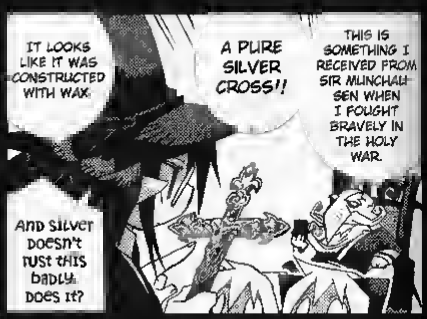

I WAS ORDERED TO RETRIEVE SCALES FROM A DRAGON WHO LIVED IN TURF—
IT HAPPENED WHEN I WAS TRAINING TO JOIN THE ARMY—

ALL THE THINGS HERE...
...I'VE COLLECTED FROM AROUND THE WORLD.


SO AS I WAS FALLING UPSIDE-DOWN I MADE A PUDDLE WITH RED WINE AND JUMPED IN IT—
WHEN I PASSED THE 583RD MOUNTAIN PASS AS THE KING HAD ORDERED ME. A COMET WITH A HORSESHOE—
THE PEOPLE OF THAT COUNTRY WORE BLACK AND WHITE CATS ON THEIR HEADS DAILY—

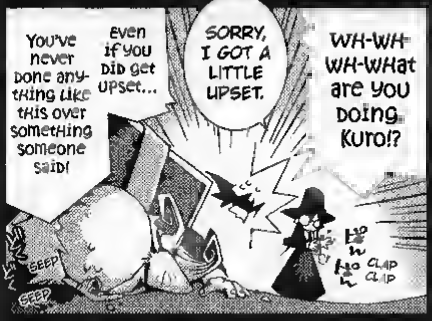
THIS IS TO THANK YOU FOR FINDING MY DEAREST ALICE AND SYLVIE.
OH, I MUST THANK THE MORTICIAN.
SYLVIE? ALICE?
I'M NOT A MORTICIAN.

I was about to leave right now!!
Hey, that's not fair!!
MAKE SURE TO HEAR EVERY WORD.
I'LL LEAVE THE REST TO YOU, / SEN.
THAT WAS WHEN A GIANT WHALE WITH A CASTLE ON ITS BACK APPEARED!!


IT LOOKS LIKE IT WAS CONSTRUCTED WITH WAX.
A PURE SILVER CROSS!!
THIS IS SOMETHING I RECEIVED FROM SIR MUNCHAUSEN WHEN I FOUGHT BRAVELY IN THE HOLY WAR.
AND SILVER DOESN'T RUST THIS BADLY, DOES IT?

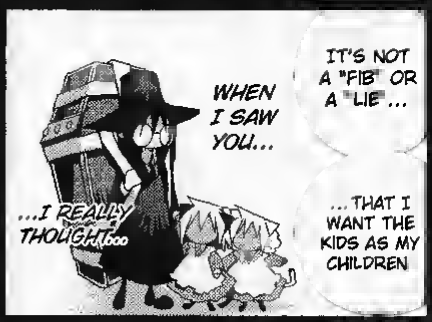
...WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH THE TWINS? THE PERSON I SPOKE WITH FIRST MENTIONED IT AS WELL.
HMM?
BY THE WAY...
YES.
THE FIBBER BARON!?
THAT'S WHAT EVERYONE IN THIS VILLAGE CALLS HIM
NOT THAT HE'S A REAL BARON!
THAT OLD MAN ACTS THAT WAY WITH ANY SET OF TWINS.
PUR-POSE...
OH. YOU DIDN'T KNOW?
I THOUGHT YOU DID IT ON PURPOSE
THE ONLY HUMAN CONTACT HE HAS IS WITH ME. I COME BY ONCE IN A WHILE TO CARE FOR HIM.
BUT NOW HE'S LIVING ALONE IN THIS IVY-COVERED MANSION
BEFORE, HE WAS ACTUALLY LIVING A HIGH LIFE THAT MATCHED HIS FIBS
...BUT HE ACTS DIFFERENT WHEN TWIN GIRLS ARE INVOLVED
USUALLY THE FIBBER BARON IS STUB-BORN AND CRANKY...
...SO YOU SHOULDN'T GET TOO INVOLVED WITH HIM.
HE ONLY TELLS LIES...
...WHO HE LOST TO AN EPIDEMIC OR SOME-THING
THAT'S BECAUSE HE USED TO HAVE TWIN DAUGH-TERS...
YOU WERE REALLY DIS-APPOINTED, WEREN'T YOU?
TO MAKE AT LEAST ONE OF HIS LIES A "TRUTH"
I THOUGHT I WOULD GIVE HIM THE FINAL WORD ONE LAST CHANCE...
WHAT'S WRONG?
THOUGH I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU CAME FOR.

TA-DA-MA.
OH, KURO-CHAN IS BACK.
NO, WE'RE THE ONES WHO SAY "TADAIMA."
SO THAT'S WHAT I HEARD.
IN THE END, IT WAS ALL A BIG PARTY INVOLVING MERMAIDS, PEOPLE WHO MADE CARRIAGES OUT OF VEGETABLES, AND A WITCH TRIAL.
DID YOU GET ANY-THING?
NOT AT ALL.
DOES IT COME IN HANDY FOR YOUR JOURNEY?
OKAERI?
YES, GOOD JOB.
LISTEN, KURO-CHAN.
UM, TO "LIE" IS TO NOT TELL THE TRUTH...
...BUT TO FIB IS TO EXAG-GER-ATE?
ANYWAY, PUTTING THAT ASIDE...
...WHAT DO YOU THINK THE DIFFERENCE IS BETWEEN A LIE AND FIB?
YEAH, SOME-THING LIKE THAT.
WE'RE GOING TO BE THE OJII-CHAN'S FOSTER KIDS
SO WE CAN'T TRAVEL WITH YOU ANYMORE...
A LIE IS USED TO TRICK OTHERS...
...BUT A FIB IS USED TO TRICK YOURSELF.
I SEE.
...IS WHAT OJII-CHAN TOLD US TO TELL YOU
DANG!
WHAT'S "FOSTER KID"?
A FIB IS A SELF-SUGGESTION THAT YOU DIRECT TO OTHERS...
...BUT IT IS ACTUALLY FILLING A HOLE INSIDE YOURSELF.

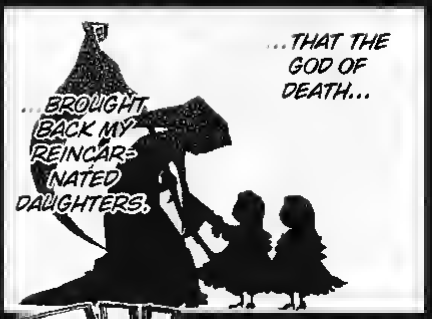

You've never done anything like this over something someone said!
Even if you did get upset...
SORRY, I GOT A LITTLE UPSET.
WH-WH-WH-WHat are you doing, Kuro!?
BEEP BEEP
CLAP CLAP

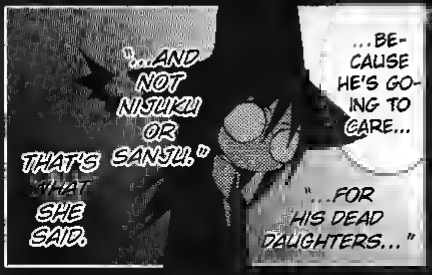
WELL, PLEASE LISTEN TO ME, MORTICIAN.
I'm embarrassed that I was talking about the difference between a "fib" and a "lie."
PLEASE DON'T TEACH THE KIDS TO LIE
I'M NOT A MORTICIAN.

Well, it IS the first time you were called a god of death
I'M NOT MAD ABOUT THAT.
Then what gives?


WHEN I SAW YOU...
...I REALLY THOUGHT...
IT'S NOT A "FIB" OR A "LIE"...
...THAT I WANT THE KIDS AS MY CHILDREN

.....
AS I LOST CONSCIOUSNESS...
Even if you got mad...
...you've never thrown things at...


...THAT THE GOD OF DEATH...
...BROUGHT BACK MY REINCARNATED DAUGHTERS.


"...AND NOT NISUKU OR SANJU."
THAT'S WHAT SHE SAID.
...BECAUSE HE'S GOING TO CARE...
"...FOR HIS DEAD DAUGHTERS..."

WHAT IS SHE TALKING ABOUT?
TWENTY-NINE AND THIRTY...

OF COURSE.
OJII-CHAN YOU LIKE US?
YEAH.
WE LIKE OJII-CHAN TOO.
OJII-CHAN'S AWAKE.
OH, HE'S AWAKE.
...WE WANT YOU TO CALL US BY OUR REAL NAMES.
THAT'S WHY...
OH.
IT'S ELLIE AND ZABETH.
LISTEN, LISTEN.
WE HEARD FROM KURO-CHAN.
NOT FAKE NAMES.
WE DIDN'T TELL KURO-CHAN BEFORE.
AT FIRST WE THOUGHT...
...THAT YOU WERE SIMILAR TO PROFESSOR.
OKAY.
GOOD JOB.
...NIJUKU SANJU.
...OJII-CHAN AND PROFESSOR ARE DIFFERENT.
BUT SIMILAR DOESN'T MEAN THE SAME.
THERE'S ONLY ONE OF HIM. THAT'S WHY HE'S OUR PROFESSOR.
JUST LIKE SANJU AND I ARE DIFFERENT...

I KNOW THAT I WON'T BE AROUND FOR LONG
BUT I CAN SUPPORT THEM SO THAT THEY WON'T BE WANDERING OR HUNGRY.
SO HOW ABOUT IT?

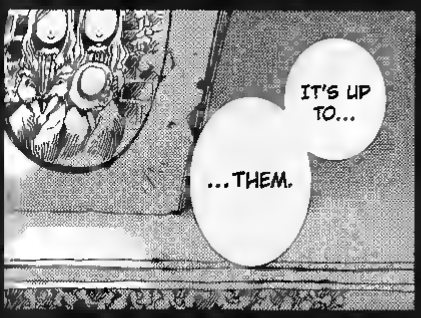
REALLY.
AFTER MY DAUGHTERS OF COURSE.
THEY'RE GOOD KIDS.

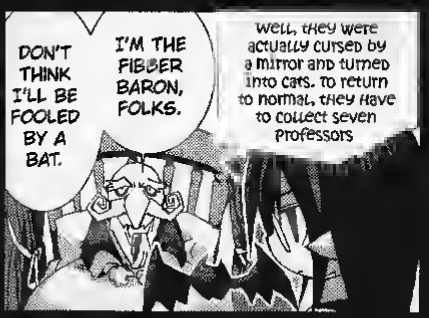
CAN YOU RECONSIDER LETTING ME ADOPT THEM?

WHY ARE THOSE KIDS TRAVELING WITH YOU?
So you do know that we're travelers.
SAY, MORTICIAN.
I'M NOT A MORTICIAN.

.....
THAT'S NOT FOR ME TO DECIDE.

You're being too honest.
...BUT HE'S...
THEY THINK THAT THEY'RE SEARCHING FOR THEIR PROFESSOR.
BECAUSE THEY DON'T HAVE A GUARDIAN


IT'S UP TO...
...THEM.


DON'T THINK I'LL BE FOOLED BY A BAT.
I'M THE FIBBER BARON, FOLKS.
Well, they were actually cursed by a mirror and turned into cats. To return to normal, they have to collect seven professors

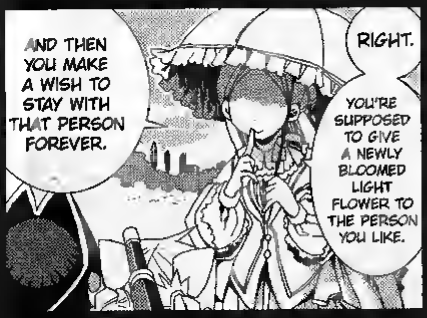
THE ONLY THING WE KNOW IS THAT HE LOST HIS TWIN DAUGHTERS.
NO ONE KNOWS THE REAL IDENTITY OF THE FIBBER BARON.
HE'S FAMOUS AROUND HERE AS "THE FIBBER BARON"!!
THAT OLD MAN FROM THE IVY-COVERED MANSION?
HEY, YOU!! STOP LAZING AROUND AND GET TO WORK!!
SO ANYWAY, THAT OLD MAN...
...IS PRETTY ATTACHED TO TWIN GIRLS...
A KING, A MOON, HE'D MIX THEM UP TO CREATE A TALE OF TRIUMPH.
A CRANKY OLD MAN WHO FIBS ALL THE TIME.
BECOME OJII-CHAN'S CHILDREN?

OJII-CHAN!
.....
...Let's tell the old man and get out of this village
since we've decided...
CLICK
YOU'LL LIVE WITH THAT OLD MAN HERE
WE'RE GOING TO BE CHILDREN?
WHAT HAPPENS THEN?
UGH...
!?
NO, WE'LL be separated.
WITH KURO-CHA OO?
ARE YOU OKAY?
What's wrong!?
UGH, MY ILLNESS...
BECAUSE WE HAVE TO TRAVEL WITH KURO-CHAN...
...AND LOOK FOR PROFESSOR
THEN WE WON'T DO IT
That's his next move, eh...
I CAN'T BREATHE WHEN CHILDREN ARE AWAY FROM ME...
SNEAK
But you're relieved, right?
SHUT UP.
You're a little relieved but conflicted and a little disappointed, too?

IT'S SHAPED LIKE THIS.
THIS WORKS WELL AGAINST SICKNESS
Maybe he heard us talking in the other room?
WELL I KNEW WE WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO LEAVE SO EASILY
OOH...
OOH...
IT'S REAAAA-AAAAALLY BITTER
SO IF YOU BITE ITS STEM, YOU CAN TELL.
THOSE TWO believed YOUR RIDICULOUS STORY
WE HAVE NO CHOICE.
I'M SORRY TO DELAY YOUR TRAVEL
THANK YOU FOR TELLING US.
I SEE.
NO PROB-LEM.
His stories are endless.
I GOT INFECTED WHEN I WAS A SOLDIER ON THE BATTLE-FIELD...
RIDICU-LOUS? THIS BURGHER SYNDROME IS REAL.
THE NAME OF THE DISEASE JUST CHANGED
HERE WE GO AGAIN.
?
OKAY!!
OKAY!?
I'LL MAKE MEDICINE THAT'S SO BITTER, IT'LL GET RID OF HIS FAKE ILL-NESS WITH A SWIFT KICK!
GET A LOT OF THEM, OKAY?
If you want to give him the final blow, I'll help you.
I GUESS HE'S NEVER GOING TO STOP ATTACK-ING ME
I THINK IT'S BECAUSE SOMEONE THREW A COFFIN AT ME.
THEN I'LL MAKE IT SHORT.

FIRST?
LIGHT?
THAT'S A LIGHT FLOWER.
YOU FOUND IT FIRST.

YEAH!
SO LET'S START OUR TREASURE HUNT!


AND THEN YOU MAKE A WISH TO STAY WITH THAT PERSON FOREVER.
RIGHT.
YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO GIVE A NEWLY BLOOMED LIGHT FLOWER TO THE PERSON YOU LIKE.

I'M NOT NIJUKU. I'M CAPTAIN.
HEY, NIJUKU.
CAPTAIN, WHAT DO YOU THINK THIS IS?

CAN'T TELL?
CAN'T?
BUT YOU CAN'T TELL THAT PERSON...
...OR THE SPELL WILL BE BROKEN.

THIS. THIS.
WHAT? WHAT?

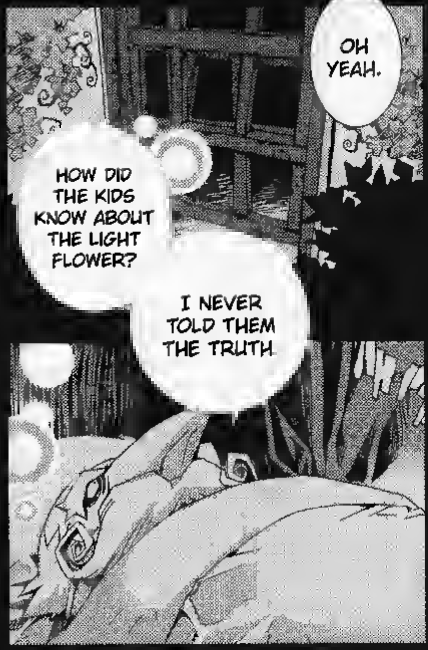
YES, A SECRET.
YOU NEED TO KEEP YOUR REAL FEELINGS A SECRET.

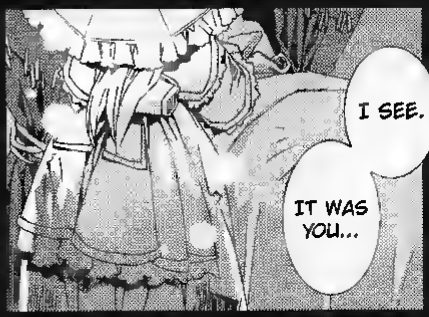
DID WE REALLY FIND TREASURE?
YEAH.
IT'S A SHINY FLOWER.

ONE MORE THING!
THIS IS FOR YOU.
NO, "OKAERI" IS WHAT WE SAY.
KURO-CHA, OKAERI.
WHAT'S THIS FLOWER?
NEWLY BLOOMED.
SHINY FLOWER.
OH, a sophisticated game for you two.
TREASURE HUNT!
WHAT ARE YOU DRESSED FOR?
?
WE CAN NEVER TELL KURO-CHA.
BUT THE REASON WE'RE GIVING IT TO YOU IS A SECRET.
THOSE LEAVES !!
WE FOUND A LOT OF MEDICINE!!
SO DID YOU FIND ANYTHING?
FLINCH
.....
Maybe there's a trick to it.
A SECRET, SHINY FLOWER.
So I guess his fake illness was common.
I DON'T NEED BLATANT LIES.
ACTUALLY, MY KING TOLD ME TO NEVER EAT ANYTHING GREEN AND BITTER, SO...

HONESTLY, I CAN'T EVEN TELL YOU WHICH ONE IS MY WIFE.
THERE WERE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT LEFT ME WITH JUST THIS PICTURE FROM HER CHILDHOOD.
WHY SO SUDDENLY?
HUH!?
NOT SURE.
THEN WHY...
...WERE YOU FIXATED ON TWIN CHILDREN?
GO AHEAD AND CONTINUE YOUR TRIP WITH THESE GIRLS.
LIKE I SAID.
...OR MAYBE IT WAS MY WAY OF APOLOGIZING TO MY WIFE FOR WHOM I COULDN'T DO A THING...
...I'M NOT SURE.
MAYBE I WAS SEARCHING FOR A REINCARNATION...
THAT'S THE LIGHT FLOWER MY WIFE USED TO GIVE ME.
THAT FLOWER REMINDED ME
I CONTINUED TO LIE...
...SO I DON'T REMEMBER MY TRUE FEELINGS.
THIS IS A PICTURE OF MY WIFE WHO DIED EARLY.
I NEVER HAD TWIN DAUGHTERS.

Knew it. That's what gives the Light flower it's name.
OH... A BUG!
YOU SHOULD LEAVE BEFORE IT GETS TOUGHER TO CROSS THE MOUNTAIN.
THE FLOWER'S GLOW [illegible] A NEW SEASON IS COMING.
SO... THAT'S IT SORRY TO KEEP YOU HERE.
OKAY.
...THOSE two are starting to HIDE things from US
BUT thanks to the influence of the old man...
...CAN I INTERPRET IT AS YOU FINALLY TELLING ME THE TRUTH?
WHAT YOU JUST TOLD ME...
BUT THIS ISN'T A LIE. IT'S A SECRET.
So what's the difference between a LIE and a secret?
I CAN'T DO ANYTHING ABOUT THAT WITH MY FIBS.
IF THERE IS A TRUTH HERE. IT'S THE FACT THAT THOSE KIDS CHOSE YOU INSTEAD OF ME.
LET'S SEE...
...A KINDER LIE...
...PERHAPS.
I KNEW YOU WOULD SAY THAT.
Me too.
.....
I DON'T NEED YOU TO FIB NOW.

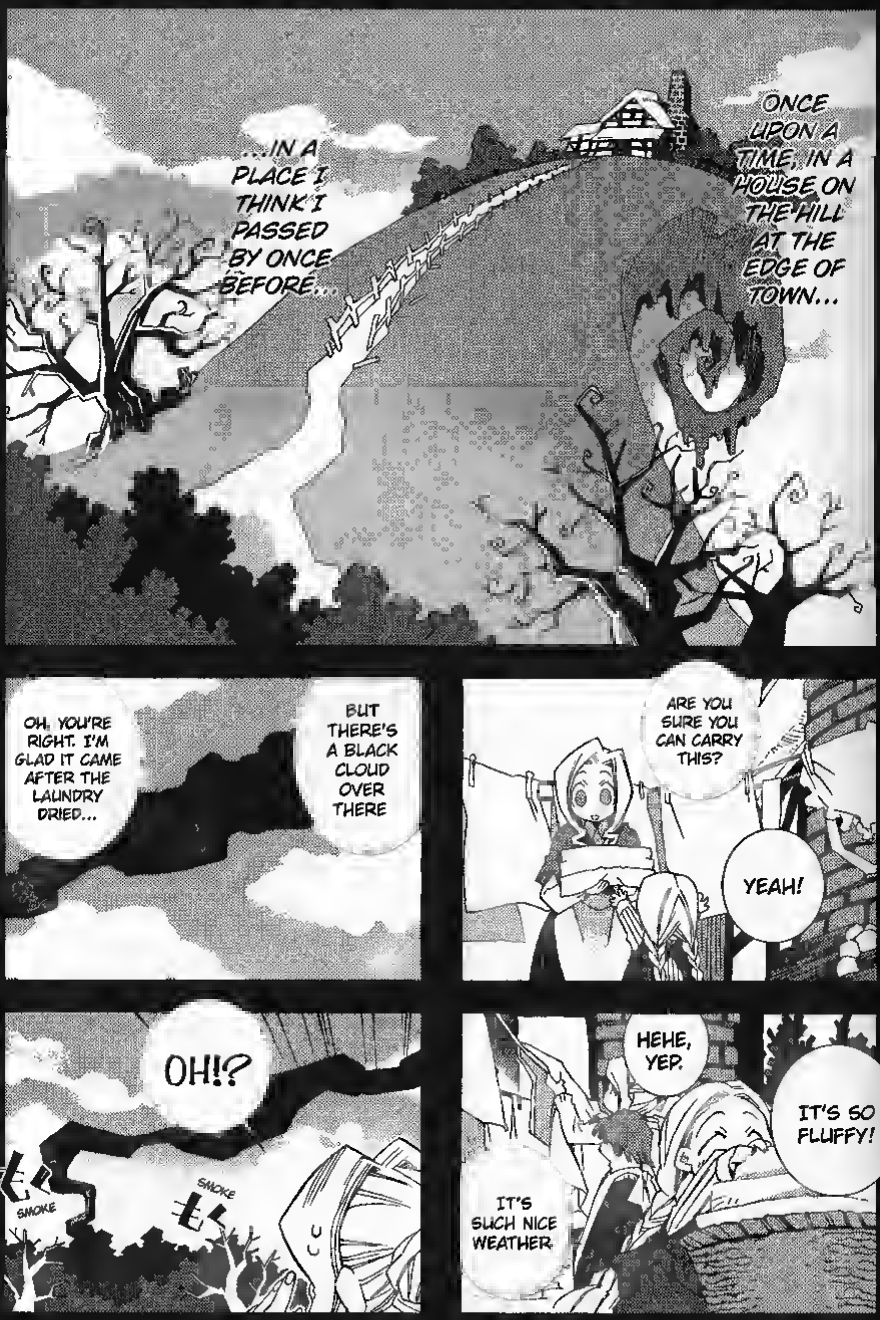

OH YEAH.
HOW DID THE KIDS KNOW ABOUT THE LIGHT FLOWER?
I NEVER TOLD THEM THE TRUTH.

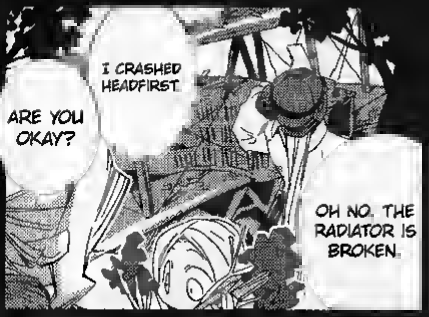

I SEE.
IT WAS YOU...

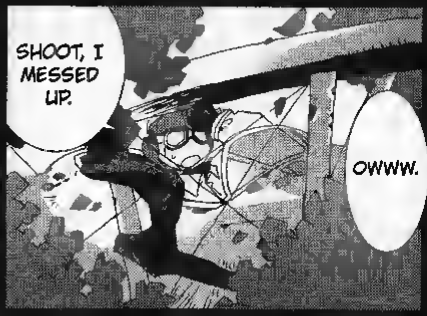
I'M TIRED OF TELL-ING FIBS.
CAN YOU TAKE ME ALREADY?

THAT'S WHY THE OTHER PEOPLE ARE SAYING THEIR FINAL GOODBYES.
HE'S THERE, BUT NOT THERE ANYMORE.
SO I THOUGHT THE FUNERAL WOULD HAVE FEWER PEOPLE.
HE WAS FAMOUS FOR FIB-BING.
WE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT THAT MEANT.
HMM...
HE'S THERE... BUT NOT THERE.
TRUE.
BUT I GUESS HE WAS WELL LIKED.
BUT OJII-CHAN...
...WAS IN THE SAME BOX AS THE ONE KURO-CHAN CARRIED AROUND...
He's not sleeping. He's dead.
KURO-CHAN, WHAT ARE THEY DOING?
WHY IS OJII-CHAN SLEEPING?
...WAS GOING TO GO ON A JOURNEY LIKE KURO-CHAN, TOO.
...SO WE THOUGHT THAT MUST MEAN THAT OJII-CHAN...
BUT OJII-CHAN IS THERE
It means that He's gone.
DEAD?

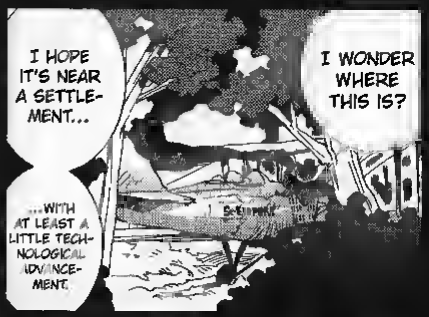
WELL, THEY DON'T HAVE FAMILY, SO YES.
ARE YOU TRAVELING WITH THOSE TWO?
CAN YOU WRITE THE DIRECTIONS HERE?
I DON'T KNOW WHY MEN LIKE TO DO THAT STUFF.
DURING THE SUMMER, HE SENDS ME LETTERS FROM VARIOUS PLACES.
MY LITTLE BROTHER IS A WANDERER TOO
IF YOU CAN INDICATE ANY LANDMARKS THAT WOULD HELP
...BUT DON'T YOU THINK THOSE KIDS ARE TOO YOUNG TO BE TRAVELING?
WELL, I DON'T KNOW YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES...
LIVING IN VARIOUS PLACES WITH NO PLACE TO CALL HOME
IT'S IMPOSSIBLE FOR US LADIES.
ESPECIALLY SINCE IT'S GETTING WINDIER
TAKE CARE.
THANK YOU.
YES, THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
IS THIS OKAY?


ONCE UPON A TIME, IN A HOUSE ON THE HILL AT THE EDGE OF TOWN...
...IN A PLACE I THINK I PASSED BY ONCE BEFORE...
BUT THERE'S A BLACK CLOUD OVER THERE
OH, YOU'RE RIGHT. I'M GLAD IT CAME AFTER THE LAUNDRY DRIED...
ARE YOU SURE YOU CAN CARRY THIS?
YEAH!
OH!?
SMOKE
SMOKE
HEHE, YEP.
IT'S SO FLUFFY!
IT'S SUCH NICE WEATHER.

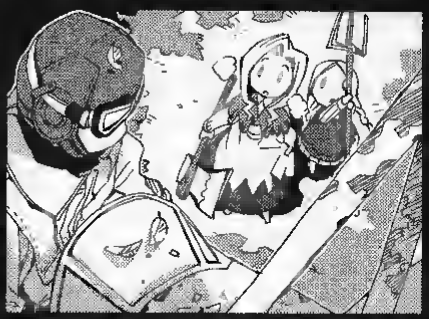

I CRASHED HEADFIRST.
ARE YOU OKAY?
OH NO. THE RADIATOR IS BROKEN.

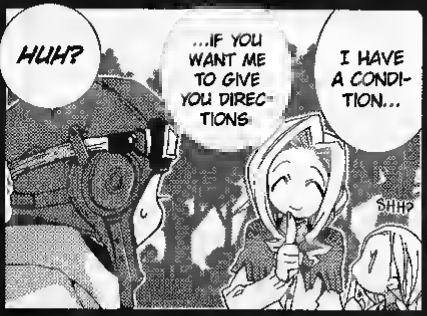

SHOOT, I MESSED UP.
OWWW.

BY THE WAY, IS THERE A LARGE TOWN NEARBY?
REALLY?
YEAH. IT'S JUST A SCRATCH.


I HOPE IT'S NEAR A SETTLE-MENT...
I WONDER WHERE THIS IS?
...WITH AT LEAST A LITTLE TECH-NOLOGICAL ADVANCE-MENT.

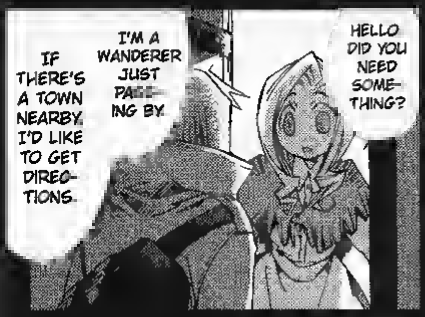
WELL, YOU COULD COME TO WHERE I LIVE...
SHH.
HOLD IT. LET'S SEE.



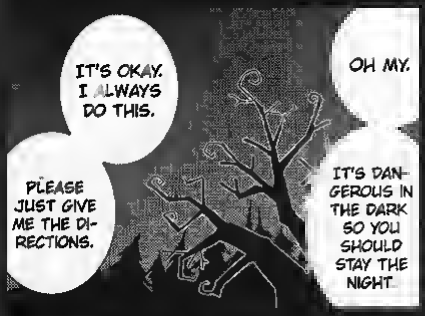

HUH?
...IF YOU WANT ME TO GIVE YOU DIREC-TIONS.
I HAVE A CONDI-TION...
SHH?

N-N-N-NO. THAT'S NOT IT!! WE SAW A STRANGE BLACK SMOKE SO WE THOUGHT IT WAS A FIRE AND BROUGHT THESE TO PUT IT OUT.
H-H-H-HOLD UP!! I'M INSIDE THIS STEEL BOX BUT I'M HUMAN AND A WEAK GIRL TO BOOT!!

YES. BUT IT'S MOSTLY A HOBBY.
SO YOU DELIVER GOODS USING A PLANE?
WON'T YOU PLEASE STAY THE NIGHT?
THERE'S NO POINT IN MAKING MEDICINE IF NO ONE USES IT
THEN I'LL STAY TOO.
I HAVE TO LET YOU TREAT ME TO GET DIRECTIONS?
...AND THE LADY THERE GAVE ME ME CANDY.
I JUST FINISHED A JOB...
WHY DID YOU GET INTO AN ACCIDENT?
SHE WAS WEIRD.
SHE CURED MY SICKNESS BEFORE TOO.
EH!? A WITCH!?
SHE'S A WITCH!
BUT SHE HAS NO BLOOD.
I WONDER IF A SHOP OWNER SHOULD GIVE OUT CANDY THAT FREELY?
OH MY
WHAT A CUTE REASON.
I HAD IT IN MY POCKET, BUT THEN I WAS ABOUT TO DROP IT, SO...
CHUCKLE
LET'S EAT IT TOGETHER.
EVER SINCE THAT TRAVELER IN BLACK
BUT IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I HAD A GUEST...
DID SHE PUT YOU IN A BOILING CAULDRON?
NO
HOW ABOUT POISON APPLES?
NO.
You guys are sneezing while scarfing down candy?
CHOO!
ACHOO!
Hm? Are you catching a cold?
ACHOO!!


HELLO DID YOU NEED SOME-THING?
I'M A WANDERER JUST PASS-ING BY.
IF THERE'S A TOWN NEARBY, I'D LIKE TO GET DIREC-TIONS.

I FEEL BAD FOR MAKING YOU HELP WITH DINNER.
AHAHA! IT'S OKAY, IT'S OKAY..
BUT ABOUT THAT PERSON DRESSED IN BLACK...


OH MY.
IT'S OKAY. I ALWAYS DO THIS.
IT'S DAN-GEROUS IN THE DARK SO YOU SHOULD STAY THE NIGHT.
PLEASE JUST GIVE ME THE DI-RECTIONS.

OH.
YEAH. I THINK I MIGHT KNOW THE SAME PERSON.
THE BLACK TRAV-ELER?
ドン ドン
SFX THUMP THUMP

OKAY, I'LL TELL YOU...
...ON ONE CONDI-TION.
COULD YOU TASTE MY COOKING?

AUNTIE, I THINK SOMEONE'S HERE.
IT MIGHT BE THE TRAV-ELER...
...BE-CAUSE WE WERE TALKING ABOUT HER.

SHE'S GOOD...
OTHERWISE I CAN'T GIVE YOU DIRECTIONS
EH?
WHA ...!?
IT'S A RECIPE I GOT FROM A FRIEND, BUT I'M WORRIED HOW IT CAME OUT...
...AND I WANT SOME-ONE TO TASTE IT.

WHO...
ガヤ
SFX CLACK

IT MIGHT BE A DIFFERENT PERSON, BUT I DO KNOW SOMEONE LIKE THAT.
OH! THAT'S RIGHT.
BY THE WAY, DO YOU KNOW THE BLACK TRAVELER, TOO?

HOLD IT. IT'S A BUNCH OF GIRLS AND KIDS!!
GEH!
PLEASE MAKE YOURSELF COMFORTABLE WHILE YOU WAIT.

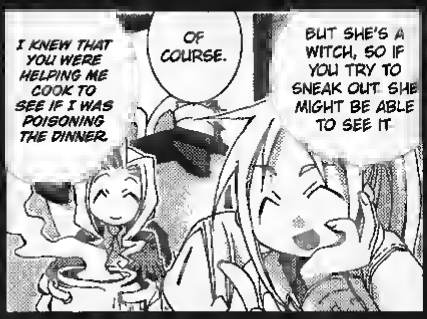
IT'S JUST THAT THE TRAVELER DOESN'T HAVE MANY SOCIAL SKILLS, SO I'M A LITTLE CONCERNED
THE TRAVELER WORE BLACK CLOTHES AND A HAT AND CARRIED SOME BIG LUGGAGE, AND THERE WERE TWO OF THEM.

I CAN'T SAY ANYTHING. I'M A VISITOR, TOO.
ARE YOU CARELESS OR IGNORANT?
AND YET YOU LET A SUSPICIOUS WANDERER IN?

IT'S JUST THAT THE TRAVELER'S APPEARANCE GETS HER INTO TROUBLE
NO, IT'S NOT LIKE THAT.
OOH!
IS ONE OF THE TRAVELERS YOUR LOVER?

DON'T WORRY. THAT WITCH IS PRETTY NICE.
NOW I GET IT!!
OH, I SEE. WE'RE THE ONES WHO'RE GONNA BE EATEN.
IT'S OKAY. SHE'S A WITCH.

THEY'RE NOT FUGITIVES, EITHER!!
OH, MY!
DOESN'T THAT MEAN ONE OF THEM IS A FELON?


I KNEW THAT YOU WERE HELPING ME COOK TO SEE IF I WAS POISONING THE DINNER.
OF COURSE.
BUT SHE'S A WITCH, SO IF YOU TRY TO SNEAK OUT SHE MIGHT BE ABLE TO SEE IT.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE TRAVELER YOU KNOW?
HEHEHE. LET'S SEE...

I DON'T KNOW IF IT'S THE SAME PERSON. BUT I KNOW A BLACK TRAVELER TOO
HUH? YOU TOO?
OH! WHAT KIND OF A TRAVELER WAS IT?
THEY HELPED ME WHEN I WAS IN A TOUGH SITUATION

THE ONE I KNOW IS A LITTLE CLUMSY AND CUTE.
OH, AND SHE LEFT ME A LITTLE HAPPINESS.

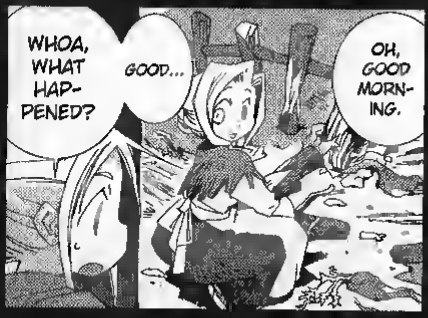
THE ONE I SAW WAS A GUY NAMED KURO WITH TWO KIDS
A GUY?
THAT PERSON WAS TRAVELING WITH CHILDREN?

I USED TO LIVE HERE ALL ALONE FOR A LONG TIME
BUT EVER SINCE SHE STOPPED BY MY LIFE HAS CHANGED A LITTLE

HE LOOKS ECCENTRIC AND SEEMS TO REJECT PEOPLE BUT IN REALITY HE'S TOO NICE AND EASY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF
IF IT'S HIM, I'D LIKE TO RUN INTO HIM AGAIN...
...ESPECIALLY WHEN I'M IN NEED

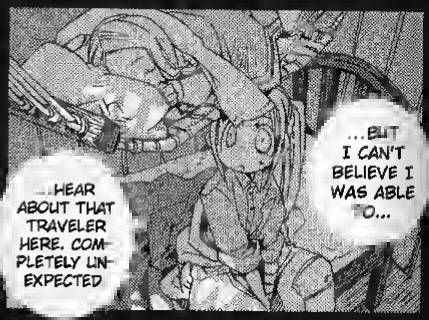
SO JUST LIKE THAT...
...I'M SURE SHE'S GOING ABOUT HER JOURNEY LEAVING LITTLE FOOTSTEPS HERE AND THERE

HOW ODD. I'M NEXT TO THE HEAT, BUT I'M GETTING CHILLS.
Maybe you SHOULD go to bed early.
SFX CRACK


WHOA, WHAT HAP-PENED?
GOOD...
OH, GOOD MORN-ING.

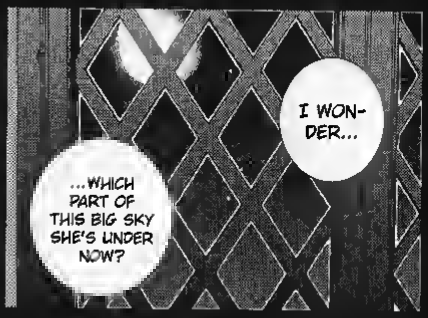
SHE REALLY MIGHT BE A WITCH...
WHOO, MY PAIN IS COM-PLETELY GONE.
I WAS EXPECTING IT TO SWELL UP TONIGHT.

EEH!?
IT'S COMMON DURING THIS TIME OF THE YEAR BUT THE ANIMALS FROM THE FOREST COME HERE FOR FOOD.
I DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH REPELLENT TO KEEP THEM AWAY LAST NIGHT.


...HEAR ABOUT THAT TRAVELER HERE. COM-PLETELY UN-EXPECTED
...BUT I CAN'T BELIEVE I WAS ABLE TO...

SO LAST NIGHT...
YOU STOPPED US FROM HEADING TO TOWN BE-CAUSE OF THIS?

NO, I WAS JUST HAPPY TO HAVE GUESTS FOR A CHANGE.


I WON-DER...
...WHICH PART OF THIS BIG SKY SHE'S UNDER NOW?

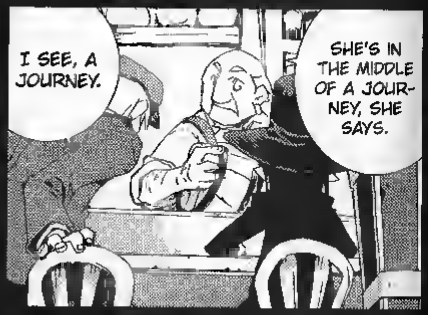
HEEHEE, THAT WAS FUN.
MAYBE...
...THE TRAVELER WAS BEHIND ALL THIS?
I CAN GIVE YOU DIRECTIONS!
I GUESS SO.
OH! THEN ME TOO!
YOU TRY TO RUN AND CATCH UP.
SO CAN I RIDE IN THAT?
IF YOU EVER SEE THE BLACK TRAVELER AGAIN I WANT YOU TO GIVE HER THIS.
HM? SURE.
OH, WAIT CAN I ASK YOU TO DELIVER SOMETHING?
YEAH, KIND OF.
I WAS REMEMBERING THE PEOPLE I MET ON MY JOURNEY
IS THERE SOMETHING IN THE SKY?
WHAT'S UP, KURO-CHAN?
THAT'S FINE.
AND I DON'T KNOW IF I'LL SEE HER.
OH, BUT IT MIGHT NOT BE THE SAME PERSON...
...SOMEWHERE UNDER THIS SKY AS WELL.
RIGHT NOW, THEY'RE...
I'LL LEAVE THAT UP TO YOU.
I MIGHT EAT IT...
I DON'T KNOW IF THE SNACKS WILL HOLD UNTIL I MEET HER AGAIN.
WE'RE GOING!
HOW DID YOU KNOW WHAT IT WAS?

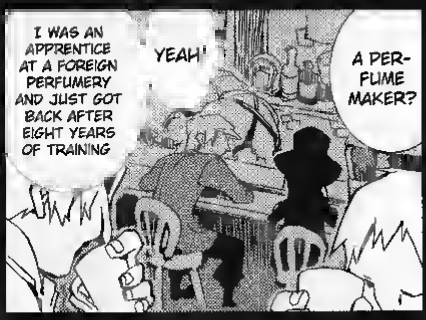
...A BAR IN A CERTAIN PLACE.
THIS IS...

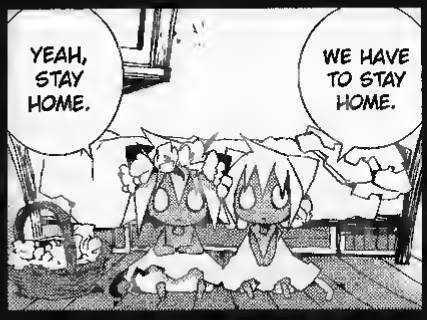
YOU'VE GOT A COFFIN, AND YOU'RE NOT EVEN DRINKING.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN A BAR?

A COFFIN!?
WHOA. WHAT THE HECK?

SQUEAL
SQUEAL
I'M HERE TO ACCOMPANY MY FRIEND.


I SEE, A JOURNEY.
SHE'S IN THE MIDDLE OF A JOURNEY, SHE SAYS.


I WAS AN APPRENTICE AT A FOREIGN PERFUMERY AND JUST GOT BACK AFTER EIGHT YEARS OF TRAINING
YEAH!
A PERFUME MAKER?

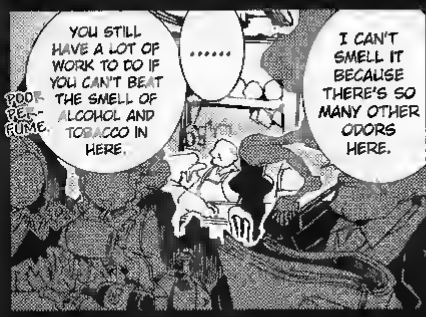

YEAH, STAY HOME.
WE HAVE TO STAY HOME.

PLEASE GO AWAY
SO I DREW ON MY MEMORIES OF MY HOMETOWN AND MADE THIS PERFUME
I WAS TOLD THAT EXPRESSING YOUR IMAGINATION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN HOW GOOD YOUR NOSE IS.

KUROCHA MADE IT FOR ME.
A FLOWER CROWN.
WHAT'S THAT ON YOUR HEAD?

THIS LAVENDER PERFUME WILL BECOME FAMOUS ONE DAY.
WELL, TEST IT OUT.

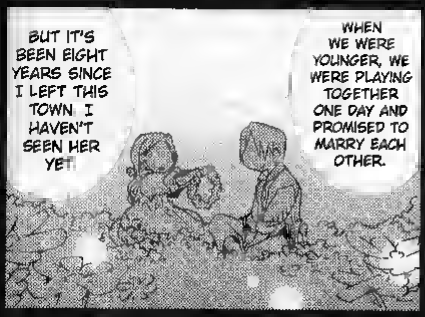
I'LL MAKE ONE FOR YOU.
NOT THIS ONE.
HOW NICE. I WANT ONE TOO.
REALLY?


YOU STILL HAVE A LOT OF WORK TO DO IF YOU CAN'T BEAT THE SMELL OF ALCOHOL AND TOBACCO IN HERE.
.....
I CAN'T SMELL IT BECAUSE THERE'S SO MANY OTHER ODORS HERE.
POOR PERFUME.

IT'S OKAY, I REMEMBERED.
NOT THIS WAY.
FACE FORWARD.
THEN, THEN...
...CAN YOU MAKE IT LIKE A PRINCESS CROWN?

WELL, ACTU-ALLY...
...SMILAX IS MY CHILDHOOD FRIEND AND MY FIRST LOVE

BUT I KNOW LAVEN-DER.
I ENCOUN-TERED IT DURING MY JOURNEY.
YOU'VE BEEN EVERY-WHERE, RIGHT?
WHAT'S THE BEST FLOWER YOU'VE SEEN?


WHEN WE WERE YOUNGER, WE WERE PLAYING TOGETHER ONE DAY AND PROMISED TO MARRY EACH OTHER.
BUT IT'S BEEN EIGHT YEARS SINCE I LEFT THIS TOWN. I HAVEN'T SEEN HER YET.

THERE WERE MANY.
I SAW A SHINING FLOWER ONCE.
I SEE.

BUT I'VE DECIDED TO PROPOSE TO HER. THAT'S WHY I MADE THIS PERFUME!
THEN I THINK YOU SHOULD GO TO HER NOW...
...IN-STEAD OF DRINKING HERE

BUT, TO ME, THE FAIREST FLOWER...
...IS THE FLOWER-SELLER SMILAX.

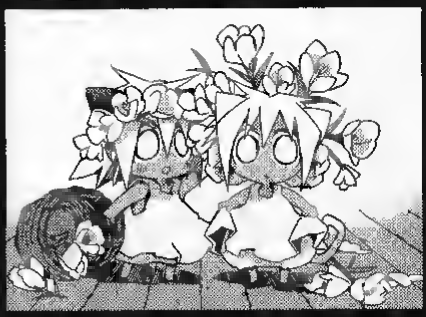
I CAN'T MUSTER THE COURAGE.
YOU'RE MAKING MY DRINK TASTE BAD.
THE PAST EIGHT YEARS SURE ARE WEIGHING ME DOWN.
AT LEAST IT'S ONLY ORANGE JUICE.

CLATTER
FIRST YOUR JOB, AND NOW YOU'RE BRAGGING ABOUT YOUR GIRL-FRIEND?
I'M WASTING MY TIME.
OH, SORRY! I'M SORRY.
BUT PLEASE LISTEN TO MY STORY.
I'LL BUY YOU A DRINK.

NOW I GET IT.
?
OH, I SEE.

ALL DONE!
HOW DO YOU LIKE IT?

SMILAX IS ALWAYS SELLING THERE.
IS THAT THE LADY SELLING FLOWERS ON THE MAIN STREET?



UH... I SEE.
SHE WAS THE ONE WHO GAVE ME THIS FLOWER.
-DUMP
-DUMP

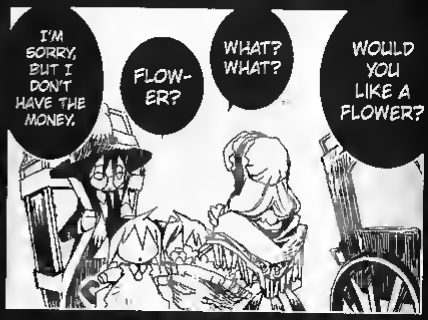
STOMP

ARE YOU PITYING ME!?
I DON'T NEED IT!!
HERE.

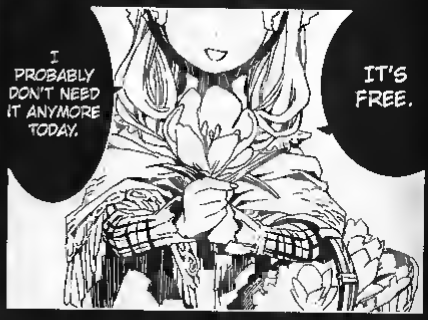
NO... BUT...
???
SO I'M GIVING IT TO YOU.
THAT'S THE STORY.

NO, BANDAGES.
CANDY?
WHAT DID YOU BUY?
UM...

YOU DON'T GET IT?
YOU DON'T SEE WHY SHE GAVE IT TO ME, A TRAVELER?

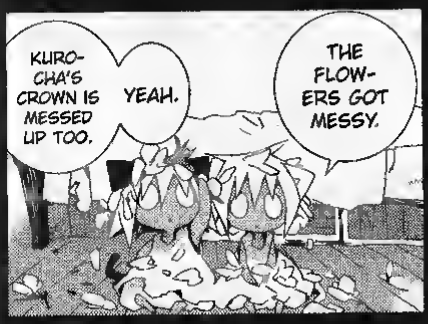

I'M SORRY, BUT I DON'T HAVE THE MONEY.
FLOWER?
WHAT? WHAT?
WOULD YOU LIKE A FLOWER?

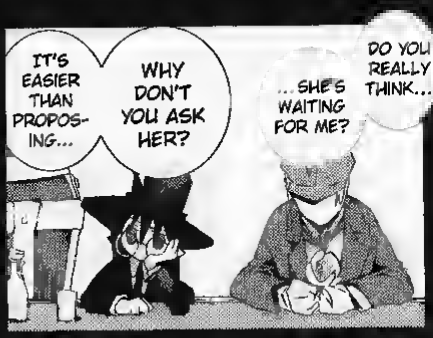
...THAT MAYBE I COULD DELIVER IT TO A CERTAIN PERSON FAR AWAY.
SHE PROBABLY MADE A WISH...


I PROBABLY DON'T NEED IT ANYMORE TODAY.
IT'S FREE.

...MEANS "I'M WAITING FOR YOU."
IN THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS, A CROCUS...

SO AT THE VERY LEAST, I WANTED TO GIVE IT TO A TRAVELER WHO CAN FREELY GO ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD.
JUST LIKE THIS FLOWER, I CAN ONLY WAIT HERE.


KURO-CHA'S CROWN IS MESSED UP TOO.
YEAH.
THE FLOW-ERS GOT MESSY.


IT'S EASIER THAN PROPOS-ING...
WHY DON'T YOU ASK HER?
...SHE'S WAITING FOR ME?
DO YOU REALLY THINK...

LIKE A PRINCESS?
BUT LOOK, IT LOOKS LIKE WE'RE WEARING FLOWERS.
YEAH, A PRINCESS FROM THE LAND OF FLOWERS.

IT'S MADE SO THAT YOU CAN SMELL ITS TRUE SCENT AFTER SOME TIME HAS PASSED.
HUH? IT MUST BE THE PERFUME.
I JUST SMELLED SOME-THING.
I SEE.

NIJUKU SMELLS LIKE FLOWERS TOO.
YEAH.
I COULD SMELL FLOWERS FROM YOU.

LAVENDER, IN THE LANGUAGE OF FLOW-ERS...
...MEANS THE SAME THING, DOESN'T IT?

.....
KURO-CHA IS LATE.
YEAH.
I HOPE KURO-CHAN COMES HOME SOON

IT'S A REALLY GENTLE SCENT.
YEAH.

HE'S NOT REALLY THE TYPE TO BE DRINKING IN A BAR
HUH?
SO THAT WAS IT?
YOU KNOW, HE WAS ACTUALLY HITTING ON YOU.
YOU CAN TELL HE'S A BIT OF A LOSER.

HUH!?
I'LL GIVE YOU THIS PERFUME.

YOU CAN ACTUALLY TELL THAT SMILAX IS A GIRL.
NOT AT ALL.
WAS I REALLY SIMILAR TO THE GIRL?
THAT'S TRUE.

I WANT YOU TO KEEP IT.
IT'S OKAY.
I THOUGHT THIS WAS FOR HER.

YEAH.
WELL, I'M GOING TOO.
THANKS FOR THE DRINK

...BECAUSE YOU LOOK A LITTLE BIT LIKE HER.
I KNOW IT'S KIND OF LATE TO SAY THIS, BUT I CAME UP TO YOU...

YOU CAN THROW IT AWAY WITH THE TRASH IN THE MORNING.
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WITH THIS?

IT WOULD BE A SHAME IF YOU BECAME A COFFIN-CARRYING GRANNY.
SO YOU SHOULD WEAR THAT AND BE MORE LADYLIKE.

NO, SHE WAS DIFFERENT FROM KURO-CHA.
COMPLETELY DIFFERENT.
BY THE WAY...
...DO YOU THINK I LOOK LIKE THE FLOWER GIRL?

WE WERE WAITING FOR KURO-CHAN
KURO-CHA TOOK TOO LONG COMING HOME.
AND WHEN I COME HOME THE PLACE IS SWIMMING WITH FLOWER PETALS
RIGHT? RIGHT?

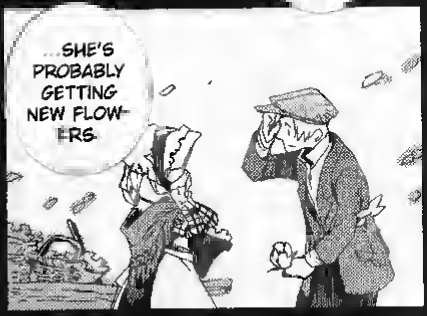
I'M SURE THAT'S TRUE.
Well, now that you mention it, maybe.
WOBBLE

IS SHE GIVING OUT FLOWERS TODAY TOO?
THE LADY WHO GAVE US FLOWERS YESTERDAY
NO.

HOW... Well, um...
.....
HOW?
HUH?
DON'T SHOUT. IT HURTS.

RIGHT ABOUT NOW...

WE CAN'T TELL.
When they smile, they really look alike.
WE'VE NEVER SEEN KURO-CHA SMILE

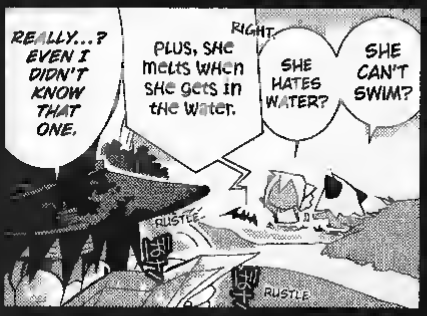

...SHE'S PROBABLY GETTING NEW FLOWERS.

WHAT?
...HAS A STORY BEHIND IT.
WHAT? WHAT?
THIS FLOWER...
THE GIRL...
...CRIED EVERY DAY FROM GRIEF.
BUT THEY WERE FORBIDDEN TO GET MARRIED...
...SO THE MAN KILLED HIMSELF OUT OF DESPAIR.
...WHO FELL IN LOVE WITH A SHEPHERD'S DAUGHTER
THERE USED TO BE A HANDSOME MAN...
...AND CHANGED THE MAN TO CROCUS AND THE GIRL TO SMILAX.
A FLOWER GODDESS TOOK PITY ON THEM...
Don't you have a hangover?
I DIDN'T DRINK ALCOHOL.
I'M UNDERAGE AFTER ALL.
THAT SO?
One country uses those flowers in weddings.
Shoot, I can't think straight.
WHAT'S THAT?
Let's see. Where was that?
WEDDING?
WHICH COUNTRY?

WELL, THEY DON'T HAVE FAMILY, SO YES.
ARE YOU TRAVELING WITH THOSE TWO?
CAN YOU WRITE THE DIRECTIONS HERE?
I DON'T KNOW WHY MEN LIKE TO DO THAT STUFF.
DURING THE SUMMER, HE SENDS ME LETTERS FROM VARIOUS PLACES
MY LITTLE BROTHER IS A WANDERER TOO.
IF YOU CAN INDICATE ANY LANDMARKS, THAT WOULD HELP.
...BUT DON'T YOU THINK THOSE KIDS ARE TOO YOUNG TO BE TRAVELING?
WELL, I DON'T KNOW YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES...
LIVING IN VARIOUS PLACES WITH NO PLACE TO CALL HOME.
IT'S IMPOSSIBLE FOR US LADIES.
THANK YOU.
TAKE CARE
ESPECIALLY SINCE IT'S GETTING WINDIER.
YES, THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
IS THIS OKAY?

WHY?
SHE'D never go in.
IT'S NOT FUN IF KURO-CHA'S NOT COMING
UH. THAT'S 'COS... UMM...

THAT'S RIGHT.
Man... It's so Hot today.
SLUMP


REALLY...? EVEN I DIDN'T KNOW THAT ONE.
PLUS, SHE melts when she gets in the water.
RIGHT.
SHE HATES WATER?
SHE CAN'T SWIM?
RUSTLE
RUSTLE

NO THANKS.
KURO-CHA, YOU SHOULD COME IN TOO.
THE WATER FEELS GOOD.

WE DID TEN HOW MANY TIMES?
NINE... TEN...
LET'S SEE.
SPLASH
SPLASH

WHAT? ALREADY?
OKAY, WE'RE GOING NOW. COME ON OUT.

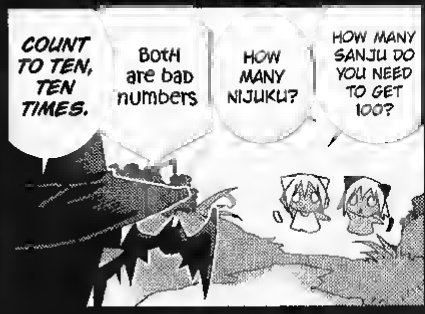
ONE... TWO...
.....
NINE...
THREE... FOUR...
...TEN.

I'LL WAIT FOR YOU TO COUNT UP TO 100.
OKAY, FINE.
PLEASE, JUST A LITTLE LONGER.
A LITTLE MORE! A LITTLE MORE!
SPLASH
SPLASH

YEAH, WE HAVE TO GO BACK, SHE SAID.
...WHEN IT'S 100.
WE HAVE TO GO BACK...

OH, YOU CAN'T COUNT THAT FAR?
ONE.
HOW MUCH IS 100?
Then maybe they have to keep trying until they can count to 100.

YOU ONLY COUNTED THAT MUCH
YEAH!
BUT! I ONLY COUNTED THIS MUCH!


COUNT TO TEN, TEN TIMES.
Both are bad numbers
HOW MANY NIJUKU?
HOW MANY SANJU DO YOU NEED TO GET 100?

HE'S NOT GOOD IN STRONG SUNLIGHT.
HE'S SLEEPING INSIDE.
SEN'S GONE?
WHERE'S SEN?

...Hey.

YEAH, CAN'T WALK.
WE CAN'T WALK.
EH? WHAT'S WRONG?
SLUMP

I'm sure they've already passed too.
Aren't they taking too long?
IT'S HOT

YOU'RE JUST TIRED FROM PLAY ING IN THE WATER.
WE DON'T LIKE THE SUNLIGHT.
WE'RE REALLY WEAK.

They're cheating because they want to play more.
It's obvious.
REALLY?

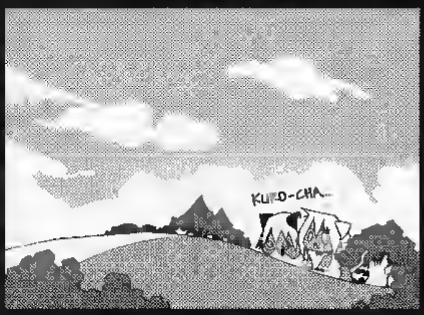
NO.
UNTIL WE COUNT TO 100.
WE CAN REST A LITTLE RIGHT?

.....
KURO?

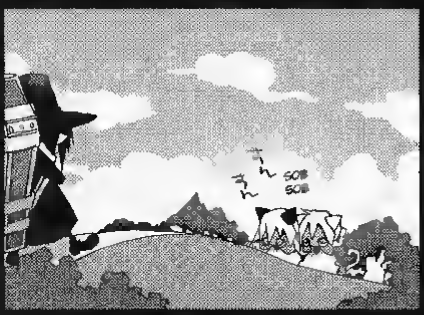
HOW MUCH IS "A LITTLE LONGER"?
YOU CAN HANG IN A LITTLE LONGER, RIGHT?
I WANT TO REACH THE TOWN BEFORE SUNSET.
.....!
GASP
SO HOW COME WE CAN'T SAY IT?
KURO-CHAN ALWAYS SAYS "A LITTLE MORE."
WE HATE MEANIE KURO-CHAN!!
YEAH!
TH-
THEN WE DON'T LIKE YOU EITHER!
IT'S NOT FAIR THAT KURO-CHA'S NOT COUNTING TO 100!
IT'S NOT FAIR THAT SEN GETS TO REST!
ANGRY
.....
THAT'S ENOUGH!!
I HATE SELFISH KIDS!!

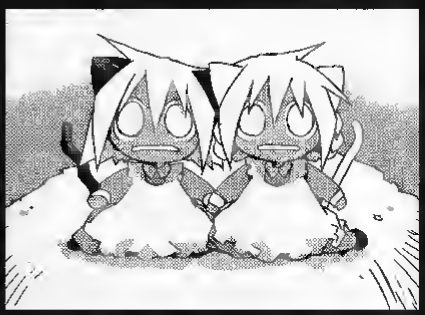
SNIFF
SNIFF

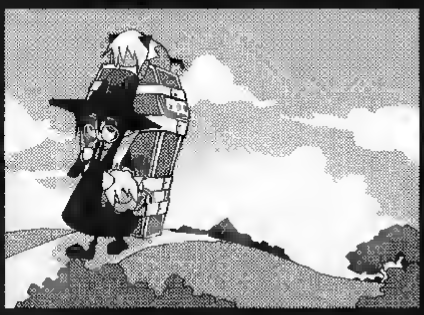
THEN STAY THERE ALL YOU WANT.
...FINE.


KUED-CHA

I'M GOING AHEAD.


SOB
SOB



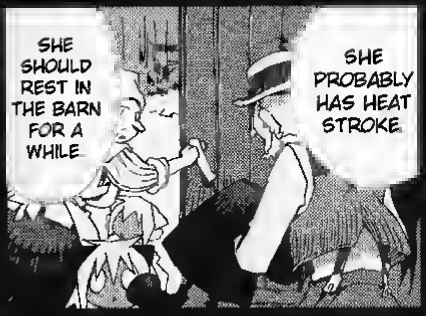


NO!!
SANJU...

IT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE I'M GETTING CLOSE TO THE TOWN EITHER.
IT'S HEAVY... MY FEET ARE HEAVY.
IT SUDDENLY GOT REALLY HEAVY...
...ON THIS JOURNEY?
DAMMIT. WHY AM I...
DID BOTH OF THEM FALL ASLEEP?
THEY'RE SO SELFISH.
I DON'T THINK OF ANYTHING DECENT WHEN I'M ALONE.
.....
STOP.
...♪ WALKED WITHOUT TALKING TO ANYONE
IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE...
I SHOULD'VE CHANGED MY BANDAGES AFTER ALL.
I DON'T FEEL SO GOOD...
...IF I HAD LEFT THEM BEHIND
I WONDER WHAT WOULD'VE HAPPENED TO THESE TWO...

THUMP
NIJUKU, SANJU. WAKE UP.
WE'RE HERE AT THE SET-TLEMENT
KURO-CHAN!
.....
KURO-CHAN THIS ISN'T THE TOWN?
AL-READY?
IT'S YOUR FAULT...
KURO-CHAN IS STILL MAD.
...BECAUSE SANJU WAS STUBBORN AND MAD.
OKAY!
SANJU, GO GET SOMEONE!!
I DIDN'T CRY!
...BECAUSE YOU'RE A CRYBABY
NO, IT'S NIJUKU'S FAULT...

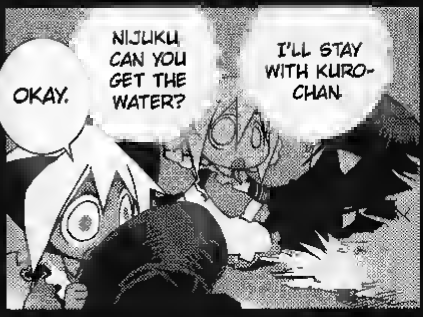
SANJU! SANJU!
I GOT WATER.


SHE SHOULD REST IN THE BARN FOR A WHILE.
SHE PROBABLY HAS HEAT STROKE.

NIJUKU! NIJUKU!

IF SHE SUFFERS, LOOSEN HER CLOTHES.
I'LL GO GET SOME WATER.

LOOK, NIJUKU.
WHAT IS IT?


OKAY.
NIJUKU, CAN YOU GET THE WATER?
I'LL STAY WITH KURO-CHAN.

KURO-CHAN'S INSIDE...
...IS A LITTLE WEIRD.

WHUMP
WHUMP

SOME-THING'S NOT RIGHT...
I DON'T KNOW.
WHAT'S THAT WHITE TAPE?

MMN...
.....

.....

!!
...EH? WHERE AM I...?

NO THANKS.
KURO-CHA, YOU SHOULD COME IN, TOO.
THE WATER FEELS GOOD.

UH, CAN YOU...
...FIRST GET ME OUT FROM UNDER THIS PILE OF LOGS?
YOU WOKE UP!
KURO-CHAN!!

...IS COM-PLETELY BLACK.
KURO-CHA'S BODY...

I SEE.
THAT'S WHY YOU WERE WORRIED.

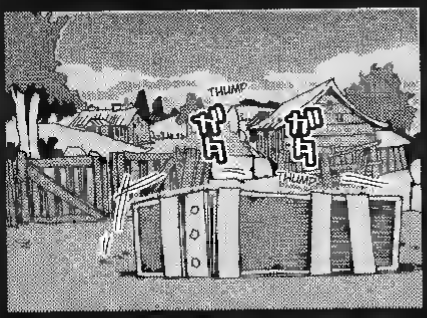
WE WERE COUNTING...
...UNTIL YOU WOKE UP.
WHY LOGS?
DWWW

BUT WE'RE MAKING UP, RIGHT?
YEAH.
I'M SORRY.
WE WERE FIGHTING TOO.

BUT KURO-CHAN DIDN'T WAKE UP.
WE COUNTED TO 100.
WE COUNTED MANY TIMES.
NO CHEATING THIS TIME.

AND THERE WAS SOMEONE WHO LET US STAY HERE.
YEAH!
YEAH. BOTH OF YOU WORKED HARD, RIGHT?
AND ALSO...

.....!
WE WERE WORRIED YOU WOULDN'T WAKE UP...
...BECAUSE SANJU WAS SELFISH.


THUMP
ガタ
ガタ
THUMP

.....
NO, I WASN'T!
NIJUKU WAS SELFISH TOO.

YEAH, SHE DIDN'T.
KURO-CHAN DIDN'T ASK ANYTHING.

That's WHY YOU were so irritable.
YEAH, IT WAS JUST THE HEAT.
IS YOUR body okay?

NOW THAT WE THINK ABOUT IT...
YEAH.
KURO-CHAN KNOWS AND SHE'S QUIET.
BUT KURO-CHA PROBABLY KNOWS.

OH.
WAS THAT IT?
I'm sure those two were irritated for the same reason.

...TO REALIZE LITTLE BY LITTLE...
...WE PROBABLY STARTED...
HEY.

You didn't change your bandages, right?
You want me to step out?

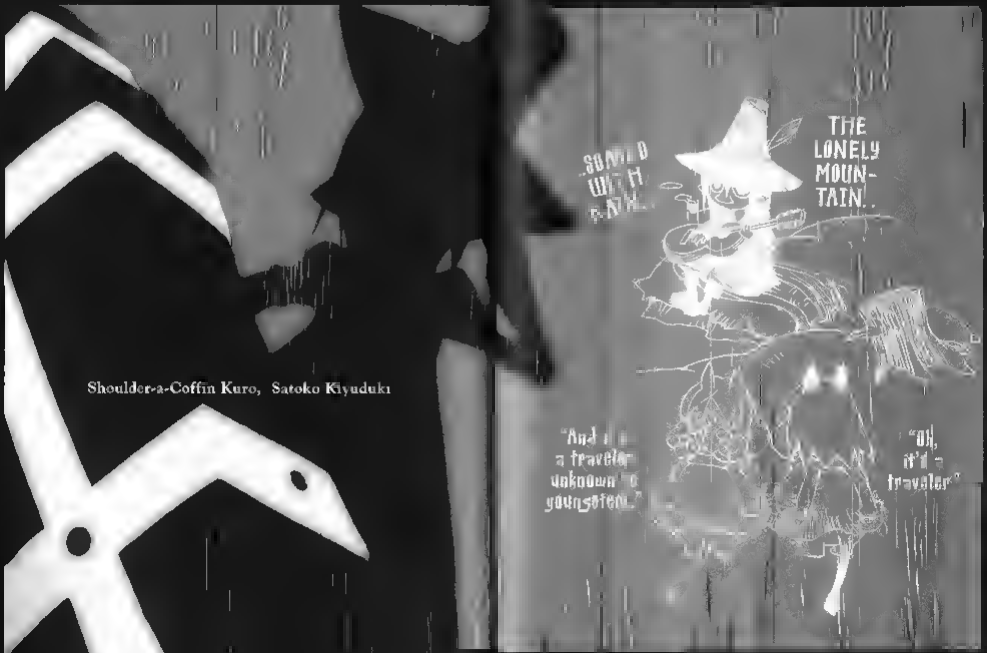
...AND WHY SHE'S CARRYING A BOX.
...KURO-CHA IS TRAVELING?
WHY DO YOU THINK...
...THE REASON KURO-CHAN IS A TRAVELER...

NO, IT'S OKAY.
THEY'VE BEEN CHANGED ALREADY.

THANK YOU FOR READING SHOULDER-A-COFFIN KURO I WOULD LIKE TO THANK MY EDITOR AND EVERYONE INVOLVED IN MAKING THIS BOOK I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO THANK THOSE WHO PICKED UP THIS BOOK

I WOULD BE HAPPY IF I COULD SEE YOU AGAIN IN THE NEXT VOLUME!

SATOKO KIYUDUKI

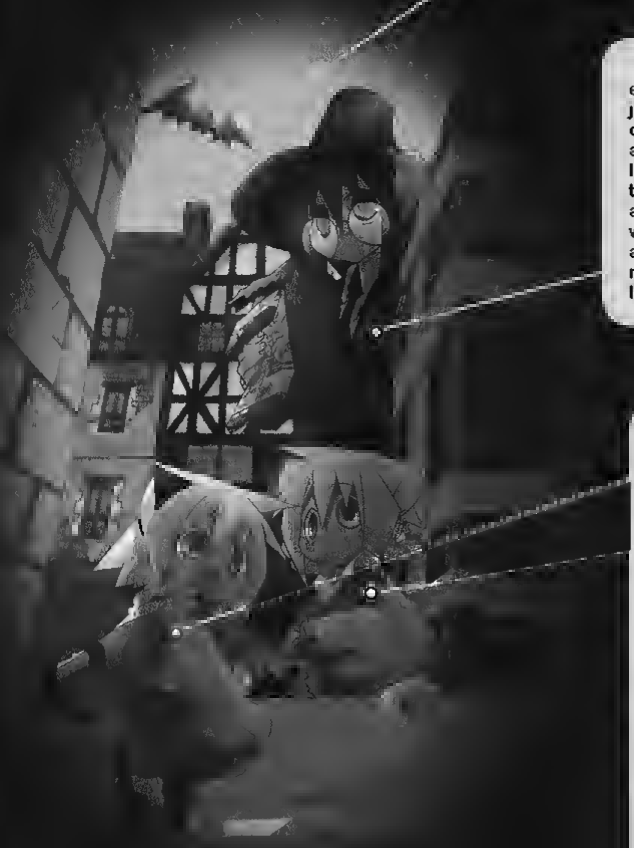

Shoulder-a-Coffin Kuro, Satoko Kiyuduki
..SOMED WITH ..NN..
THE LONELY MOUN-TAIN..
"And a traveler unknown" o youngsters."
"oh, it's a traveler"

Shoulder-a-Coffin

KURO

...SPEAK!

SEN is... well, Sen. Snarky to a fault, but often the voice of reason.



KURO often gets mistaken for a boy throughout her journey. While a large part of this is because of her appearance, it also has a lot to do with the way she talks in Japanese. Kuro always refers to herself with masculine pronouns and her speech is often more boyish than ladylike, just like Kuro herself!

NIJUKU and SANJU, Kuro's adorable companions, also have their own unique way of speaking. Their dialogue is written entirely in *kana*, which is made up of the two most basic writing systems of the Japanese language. This visual aid goes even further in stressing the pair's innocence and naïveté. They also speak in broken phrases, which we've tried to retain in this edition. Since one of the twins childishly refers to Kuro as "Kuro-cha," they're pretty easy to tell apart. Do you know which is which?